Being a Leader, a Woman, and a Survivor of Childhood Bullying: A Phenomenological Study

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Dedication

Dedicated to my beautiful mother Cecelia who always told me to have the courage to lose sight of the shore and discover new oceans.

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To Dr. Kathy Geller who encouraged me to pursue this doctorate and has been a beacon of support, wisdom and guidance

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To my participants who shared their stories of strength, resilience, and love

And certainly, to my husband and son who stood by and waited patiently as I accomplished more than I could have ever imagined

To each of you, I feel overwhelmingly grateful and blessed to have had you on this journey.

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Abstract

Being a Leader, a Woman, and a Survivor of Childhood Bullying: A Phenomenological Study

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Childhood bullying is a long-term and pervasive issue that affects a significant proportion of the population, but very few studies exist that explore this issue with adult survivors through a qualitative lens. This study explored the lived experiences of women leaders who are survivors of childhood bullying to better understand their experiences as victims of bullying and as successful adult leaders. It also explored how childhood bullying experiences may influence survivors' approaches to leading. Themes that emerged were related to how women survivors re-experienced socially constructed norms while leading, how their approach is informed by their childhood experiences and their specific approach to leading. Recommendations for schools, organizational development professionals, and future research are provided.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to the Problem

For a girl who is the victim of childhood bullying, school may be a fearful and chronically stressful environment (Carney, Hazler, Oh, Hibel, & Granger, 2010; Evans, Smokowski, & Cotter, 2014; Olweus & Mortimore, 1993). She may experience direct bullying like name calling or indirect bullying like exclusion from social groups (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). A short bus ride home may become a trap where bullies target her and unleash cruel intentions. A lunchroom may no longer be a place for reprieve during the school day, but an open arena for attacks. As a result, the victim may feel depressed and ashamed. Her social connections may become strained and friendships only entrusted to a select few (Olweus & Mortimore, 1993).

The effects of these experiences may follow her well into adulthood and affect her personally and professionally. As adults, bullying survivors are more likely to experience depression and social isolation, which could interfere with interpersonal relationships (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). Bullying survivors may also exhibit pro-social behaviors by attempting to protect others from work-based bullying or prevent bullying in school settings (Mathiassen, 2013). Survivors of traumatic experiences like bullying may also have increased emotional intelligence through higher developed senses of empathy and altruism (Janson, 2008; Mathiassen, 2013; Moxley & Pulley, 2003; Olivares, 2011). At the same time, emotional intelligence, empathy, and altruism have been documented as important characteristics of well-known leadership styles and may contribute to success in professional leadership roles (Lorenzi, 2004; Popper & Mayseless, 2007). In addition

to displaying the psychological outcomes, bullying survivors are less likely to pursue advanced education and obtain higher-paying jobs, which could affect professional achievement (Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014).

Unfortunately, the educational and professional outcomes of bullying are set within a broader context of known and ongoing challenges and disparities that women encounter in the United States. Women in general are socially responsible for family caretaking and household responsibilities, two responsibilities that may take away from time spent on the job and reduce their overall economic attainment. Women in general are frequently paid considerably less than their male counterparts for completing the same job (Grey-Bowen & McFarlane, 2010). Women leaders, specifically, may also be less likely to be assigned professional leadership roles for situations that are operating well and more likely to be assigned to poor-operating situations (Vongas & Al Hajj, 2015). Collectively, women leaders' family responsibilities, economic disparities, and leadership challenges may create deficits in career "capital" throughout a woman's lifespan that limits her ability to achieve high-level positions and allows men to dominate executive-level positions in many organizations (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Thus, all of the described educational, professional, and leadership issues would seemingly detract from being successful as a leader and from having success within a workplace.

While there is an extensive body of literature on women's leadership challenges and bullying, the lived experiences of women leaders who have endured yet seemingly overcome or successfully coped with the challenges of unfortunate childhood bullying experiences and ongoing societal issues are not apparent within existing scholarly literature. The missing experiences leave a gap in the literature and may limit the ability

for leadership development, bullying intervention advocates, and other practitioners to adequately inform their work. As such, this study took a phenomenological approach to fill a gap in the existing literature and to provide a voice to women leaders who survived childhood bullying. The study also intends to support the work of advocates who work tirelessly to help protect and support current and future generations of women leaders.

Statement of the Problem to be Researched

Childhood bullying victimization experiences may have life-long effects and continue to influence mid-career women leaders who were victims.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

Purpose Statement

This study explored the lived experiences of female leaders to understand how surviving childhood bullying may influence their leadership in current professional roles. In doing so, this study contributed to a limited body of qualitative literature on the long-term effects of bullying, as well as complemented the extensive quantitative literature on the short-term effects of bullying. It also contributed to the extensive body of literature on leadership development.

Significance

There are several reasons why this study is significant. The first reason is that it explored the ongoing and pervasive issue of childhood bullying. According to Stopbullying.gov (n.d.), an initiative of the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, the ramifications of childhood bullying are apparent. “In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990’s, the shooters had a history of being bullied” (Stopbullying.gov, n.d., Section 2, para. 3).

One of the initial steps to addressing any issue of this gravity is understanding the breadth of the problem; however, there is no comprehensive tracking system for childhood bullying in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2013) reported that approximately 20% of high school students reported bullying victimization within the last 12 months. The data are based on recent self-reports only from high school students in 45 states every two years since 2009. Conversely, other studies have reported anywhere from 29.9% to 53% of elementary, middle, and high school students in the United States have experienced some form of bullying (Nansel et al., 2001; Puhl, Peterson, & Luedicke, 2013; Wang et al., 2009). If these prevalence rates are an accurate representation of the problem, a significant percentage of women and women leaders may have been victims of bullying.

This study is also significant because it may provide further validation for mounting childhood bullying prevention and intervention efforts. Given the lack of a comprehensive approach to tracking bullying prevalence, it is difficult to determine if bullying prevalence has increased in recent years; however, there has been a large-scale recent national effort to address and prevent bullying. While this study did not address prevention efforts directly, advocates may use the results from this study to demonstrate how childhood bullying experiences are viewed in retrospect by survivors, perhaps justifying even more attention to bullying prevention, intervention, and treatment efforts throughout the lifespan.

This study is also significant because it used a qualitative approach to study long-term influences, specifically for women. Researchers have studied the negative effects of childhood bullying within childhood extensively and to some extent within early and

mid-adulthood (Brown, S. & Taylor, 2008; Carney, 2008; Evans, Smokowski et al., 2014; Takizawa et al., 2014). Existing research has been primarily quantitative, presumably due to the sensitive study population and the extensive scope of some of the studies. Only one qualitative study was found to date that demonstrated some of the potential useful outcomes of bullying in adulthood (Mathiassen, 2013) and only one specifically addressed effects of childhood bullying for men (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). Neither of these studies specifically addressed women. As such, the study contributes to the knowledge base on the unique challenges and disparities that women may encounter during their careers.

Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding

This phenomenological study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of women leaders who experienced childhood bullying victimization?
2. How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied in childhood describe their approach to leadership?
3. How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied describe their challenges and successes while leading?

The Conceptual Framework

This study references literature from three different but interrelated disciplines including psychology, business, and sociology. The intention of this approach is to represent the boundaries this study topic crosses. Childhood bullying is a psychological and sociological issue and, when viewed through the lens of professional women leaders, crosses into issues intricately related to business and leadership development.

Research Streams

This study's literature is divided into three streams including (a) effects of bullying, (b) emotionality, and (c) pro-social leadership. The first stream reviews the literature on the negative effects of childhood bullying in both childhood and adulthood. Quantitative and school-based studies comprise most of the research. This stream also reviews the additional potential transformative outcomes with one qualitative study on long-term outcomes on bullying as well as positive change after trauma.

The second stream draws related concepts from the first and second stream and integrates them into a review of emotionality. This stream includes studies on empathy, prosocial behavior, emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence in relation to leadership, and female leader emotions. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are described in tandem in this stream.

The third stream draws upon the literature on emotional intelligence and empathy presented in the second stream to explore the concept of prosocial leadership. The stream opens with a presentation on empathy and altruism's relationship to leadership. Using Lorenzi's (2004) prosocial leadership framework, existing leadership theories are then explored in relation to this framework. Qualitative and quantitative studies as well as empirical commentary comprise this stream.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework including the three literature streams and subtopics within each stream.

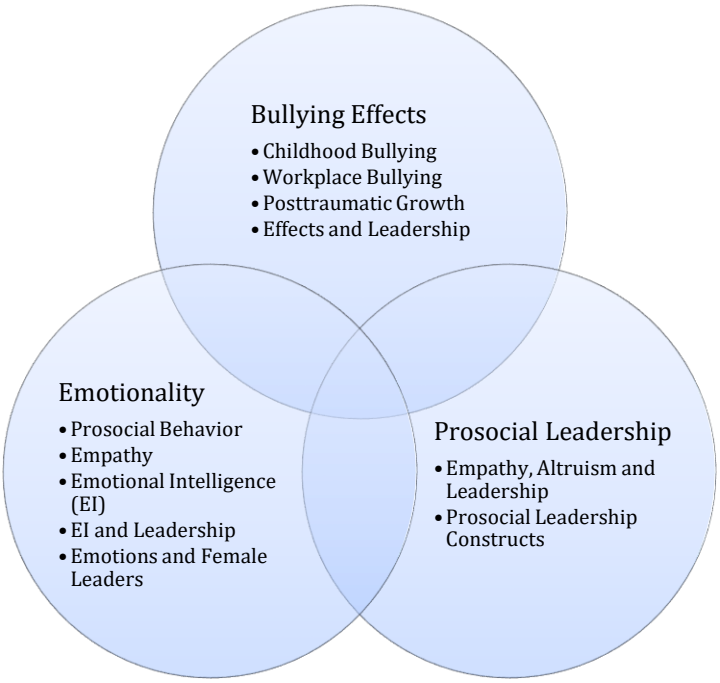

Figure 1. Conceptual framework. This framework depicts the three literature streams.

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms and their respective meanings within the context of this study.

Childhood bullying

Intentional, chronic imbalance of power between a child and a peer or peer group resulting in harassing behavior (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2013; Olweus, 1978; Olweus & Mortimore, 1993); also described as teasing, victimization, interpersonal trauma and trauma; occurs up to age 17, in school and home settings.

Mid-career woman leader

A woman with at least 10 years of professional experience and in a position of informal or formal leadership within a community or professional setting

Prosocial leadership

Leadership that has a "positive, effective influence, with constructive goals that serve the common good . . . shifts the locus of measurement of leadership from the leader to those served, including employees and customers" (Lorenzi, 2004, p. 283). Is also used to describe a general approach to leadership and includes transformational, authentic, and distributed leadership.

Transformative actualization

Using transformative potentiality, the action taken to enact positive change (Mathiassen, 2013).

Transformative potentiality

The likelihood of an individual to use a negative experience toward positive change (Mathiassen, 2013)

Trauma

"An emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster" (American Psychological Association, 2014, para. 1). Also used within the literature to describe an outcome of bullying, teasing, and victimization.

Workplace bullying

Intentional and repeated acts of emotional and relational aggression within the workplace resulting in an imbalance of power and negative emotional and physical outcomes (Escartín, Salin, & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011). Also called

workplace harassment and workplace victimization and included within the broader concept of workplace incivility.

Assumptions and Limitations

A primary assumption was that childhood bullying victims could be studied collectively despite the reasons for the bullying or types of the bullying experienced. Study participants described a variety of reasons they were bullied (e.g., weight, appearance, abilities and inabilities), but this study assumed that these differences contributed to a rich description of participant lived experiences.

Another primary assumption was that childhood bullying had an influence on women leaders at some point during their lives. This study did not qualify the influences, but assumed that effects existed and may exist in their present lives. It also assumed that these influences on some level related to participant leadership development, approach and or abilities.

A limitation of this study was my existing professional relationships with four of the seven participants in this study. One participant I knew as a colleague for over five years. One participant had been colleague for about one year. The other two participants were a part of my professional network, but I did not know them well. I believe I had an established level of trust incomparable to that I had with the remaining three participants in the study whom I did not know prior to the study. I recognize that this level of trust may have made me privy to data that would not have been shared otherwise.

A limitation of the study was that all participants were presently leaders in a range of non-profit organizations although four of the seven had at one or more points in their career when they worked for-profit organizations. Their leadership roles in non-profit

settings may have provided different experiences than women who served in similar leadership roles in for-profit settings had. Participant descriptions within non-profit and for-profit organizations were included in the final report, but were not specified.

A delimitation of this study was that the central foci of this study were childhood bullying victimization and leadership. These two topics were given equal importance within this study. This study was not designed to explore either of these topics individually.

Summary

The short-term effects of childhood bullying for children are known. The long-term effects for men may also be known through existing literature, as well as the long-term effects as documented in longitudinal quantitative studies. What was not known were the experiences of women and women who have become leaders despite being victimized as children. This study explored the lived experiences of woman leaders who are childhood bullying survivors and how these experiences interplayed with their approaches to leadership. This study helps to fill gaps in the literature, support bullying prevention efforts, and provide documentation for yet another issue that a portion of women leaders may experience during their careers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to Chapter 2

As introduced in Chapter 1, childhood bullying victimization is a considerable problem that may influence women leaders who were victims. This chapter reviews relevant literature to the study's topic beginning with a review of the literature on the effects of childhood bullying and trauma. This chapter also explores some of the outcomes of bullying victimization through a presentation of the literature on emotions and emotionality. Lastly, this chapter presents pro-social leadership and its connections to the emotions described in the second stream. In doing so, this review provides a primer about this study's participants' lived experiences.

Literature Review

Stream 1: Bullying Effects

As this study focused on women leaders who experienced childhood bullying victimization, this literature stream explores the existing literature connected to childhood and workplace bullying. This exploration includes history and definitions, psychological, educational, and economic and leadership effects. This stream also incorporates the literature on trauma, as the literature consistently refers to bullying victimization as trauma or traumatic.

Childhood bullying. Consistently throughout the literature, bullying is defined as when a group harasses an individual or a "single individual harasses another" (Olweus & Mortimore, 1993, p. 8). In the harassment, an imbalance in power occurs between the bully and victim where the bully holds more power than the victim. This imbalance of

power occurs “repeatedly and over time” (Olweus & Mortimore, 1993, p. 78) and can be described as victimization. The term bullying, however, should not be used when “two students of approximately the same strength (physical or psychological) are fighting or quarrelling” (Olweus, 1993, p. 10). In addition to the imbalance of power, bullying is when the bully acts intentionally to commit “deliberate and hurtful behavior” (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2013, p. 71).

Childhood bullying can be categorized as either direct or indirect. Direct bullying involves hitting, kicking, pushing, or verbal insults (Olweus, 1978). Indirect bullying or relational bullying involves social isolation or exclusion from group activities (Wang et al., 2009). Indirect bullying may be less noticeable than direct bullying and girls are more likely to be victims of indirect bullying (Wang et al., 2009). Moreover, girls are more likely to be relationally aggressive than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Direct and indirect bullying may occur in person or through social media interactions called cyberbullying (Hampel, Manhal, & Hayer, 2009; Olweus & Mortimore, 1993).

Educational and economic effects. Bullying victimization may interfere with a child’s academic self-efficacy or the belief that one can exhibit a certain behavior or perform certain tasks which “are induced and altered most readily by experience of mastery arising from effective performance” (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). There is a strong correlation between bully victimization and lower academic self-efficacy in comparison to non-victimized children (Popp, Peguero, Day, & Kahle, 2014), as well as a significant relationship between childhood bullying and lower educational attainment, which may be due to the bully victim feeling depressed, that she does not belong, or feels unsafe at

school (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). As a result, her attendance may suffer, impacting her academic success.

With these potential outcomes, she may be set on a long-term trajectory of academic failure that will last into adulthood. The more childhood bullying an individual experiences, the less likely he or she is to achieve higher levels of education in adulthood, which leads to a disparity in income between bullied and non-bullied adults starting at 10 years of professional experience or the mid-career level (Brown, S. & Taylor, 2008).

Psychological and socio-emotional effects for children. Childhood bullying may also result in short- and long-term psychological and sociological effects for children. Victimized children have higher levels of rumination, aggression, resignation, and passive avoidance than non-victimized children (Hampel et al., 2009). Victimized children have demonstrated higher levels of inability to cope, increased depression, decreased future optimism, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem. These effects increase with the amount of bullying experienced (Evans, Smokowski et al., 2014). Children who had been cyber-bullied exhibited similar symptoms including anxiety, depressed feelings, and outward emotion (Nordahl, Beran, & Dittrick, 2013). There also may be a relationship between frequency of bullying and traumatic responses, as individuals who experienced frequent bullying episodes were more likely to report feelings of trauma to a hypothetical bullying experience (Carney, 2008). Traumatic responses included avoidance, nightmares, "numbness" to the situation, and being emotionally triggered. Gender may also influence the severity of psychological distress experienced in response to bullying, as girls experience higher levels of distress from bullying than boys (Nordahl et al., 2013).

Bully victims are more likely to be rejected by peers and may be less likely to exhibit the interpersonal skills to successfully navigate relationships (Fox & Boulton, 2005; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Deficits in interpersonal skills may be evident in childhood by shyness, talking quietly, not standing up for herself when bullied, and tolerating bullying victimization (Fox & Boulton, 2005). Later in life, victims may experience more loneliness compared to non-victims because victims may not have the important interpersonal skills to obtain and maintain friendships (Tritt & Duncan, 1997). However, children who are bullied and experience other ongoing adversity may be able to overcome or cope with these outcomes when they have good relationships with adults and parents, have problem-solving skills, are good learners, and believe they have value (Baldry & Farrington, 2005; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Psychological and health effects for adults. Childhood bullying victimization's psychological effects may not just be confined to childhood, but also last well into adulthood. Childhood bullying victimization increases the risk of adult depression and increases the likelihood of reduced social interactions in adulthood, resulting in mental health outcomes similar to those of adults who have been placed in foster care or abused as children (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Takizawa et al., 2014). These results seem to mimic those found in the studies with children mentioned in the literature review for this study.

Carlisle and Rofes's (2007) study is one of few studies that explored perceptions of long-term bullying effects with childhood bullying survivors. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study with 15 men between the ages of 26 and 57 from the United States and United Kingdom who had attended boarding schools as children and reported bully victimization. The authors used semi-structured interviews to have

participants recall how childhood bullying had affected them during their adult lives and a quantitative survey asking the men to rate 26 levels of physical and mental functioning. Most men in the study reported that bullying "had a significant effect on them" that caused psychological issues, avoidance issues, shame, powerlessness, loneliness and depression in adulthood (p. 19). Carlise and Rofes concluded that bullying may have long-term effects that last well into adulthood.

Transformative change. Beyond the negative psychological effects, bullying victimization may result in transformative outcomes. Mathiassen (2013) conducted a narrative study that explored the perceptions of long-term effects of bullying with two Danish adults, one female and one male, who were victims of childhood bullying. Her findings suggested that bullying may be viewed as an impetus for change. One participant who was bullied as a child described experiencing physical pain when she learned a direct report was being bullied at work. The participant also felt compelled to intervene and help her employee. The other participant in the study who was bullied as a child proactively advocated for changes at his child's school to eliminate bullying. As Mathiassen (2013) described, bullying victimization outcomes are influenced by "transformative potentiality" or the ability to transform and manifest "transformative intentions" where the bullying experience may be a catalyst for action in adulthood.

Workplace bullying. Bullying is not confined to childhood and appears in a large body of literature about workplace bullying and aggressions. While there are various definitions of workplace bullying, most scholars ascribe a definition similar to childhood bullying. They define it as recurring, intentional, emotional, and physical harassment in which the victim is unable or does not want to address the bullying,

resulting in power imbalances (Brodsky, 1976; Einarsen, 1999; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Women, specifically, experience workplace bullying as verbal or relational harassment compared to men who view bullying as "abusive working conditions" (Escartín et al., 2011). Unlike with childhood bullying, often the bully is in a formal position of power over the victim or target (Ellen Mathisen, Øgaard, & Einarsen, 2012). Bullying is also viewed as component of workplace incivility, a broader concept of workplace aggressions occurring within the workplace (Callahan, 2011; Ghosh, Jacobs, & Reio, 2011).

Workplace bullying health effects. Workplace bullying may result in negative health outcomes (Lovell & Lee, 2011; Nielsen, Magerøy, Gjerstad, & Einarsen, 2014). Bullied workers are more likely to experience depression (McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013) and more long-term absences (Mundbjerg Eriksen, Hogh, & Hansen, 2016). Both men and women who were bullied or witnessed bullying were more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) whereby the victim continues to be triggered and revisits the bullying experience (Tehrani, 2004). Due to workers' inability to escape their situations, they may be more likely to be conditioned to re-experience the trauma of bullying (Tehrani, 2004). However, workers with higher levels of emotional intelligence may experience less severe psychological and emotional effects of workplace bullying (Ashraf & Khan, 2014).

Posttraumatic growth. If referring to bullying as a form of trauma, a large body of research demonstrates the transformative potentiality of traumatic experiences (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Carney, 2008; Evans, Smokowski et al., 2014). Calhoun and Tedeschi (2004) have termed this "posttraumatic growth" or transformative changes after

experiencing a traumatic or highly stressful event. Posttraumatic growth includes increases in "relating to others," "new possibilities," "personal strength," and "spiritual change" (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004, p. 460). Women who have experienced trauma report more positive growth from traumatic experiences than men in all of the categories (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Moreover, people who have experienced traumatic events report more positive change than those who had not experienced traumatic events and are more likely to report posttraumatic outcomes when they believe the event had a significant effect on them (Johnson & Boals, 2015).

The postraumatic growth categories are also noticeable in the literature on positive change after trauma. The concept of "personal strength" has been described by childhood bullying survivors who believed their childhood bullying experiences gave them strengths they would not have otherwise had (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). "Spiritual change" has also been noted by individuals who had experienced childhood traumas ranging from sexual abuse and physical abuse to neglect and alcoholism (Schaaf, 2012). Spirituality provided meaning to both the trauma and to the individuals' lives. The ability to "relate to others" is seen from Staub and Vollhardt (2008), who proposed the concept of "altruism born of suffering" whereby traumatic experiences can result in a desire to help others. They posited that traumatic experiences may cause a victim to experience "altruistic models and guides" and to "prevent others' victimization or [help] in its aftermath" (p. 276). Frazier et al. (2013) expanded upon Staub and Vollhardt's research by examining the relationship between trauma and individual prosocial behaviors like volunteering, helping, empathy, and religious beliefs and practices. The

researchers found the more traumas a person had experienced, the stronger correlation to prosocial behaviors.

Effects and leadership. As this study explored the experience of leading as a victim of bullying, it is relevant to compare the documented effects of bullying to documented effective leadership characteristics. Using a trait-based approach to leadership, the effects of bullying would seem contradictory to suggested traits of a successful leader. Seminal trait leadership theorist Stogdill (1974) proposed that leaders demonstrate eight key traits including self-confidence and sociability. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) expanded that leaders must be self-confident, as "self-confidence plays an important role in decision-making and in gaining others' trust" (p. 54). Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004) added the importance of extraversion, emotional stability, and problem solving.

These findings can also be found within empirical research on leadership traits. Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002) found that extraversion, defined as when an individual is outgoing most of the time, was reported as one of the most frequently cited characteristics of successful leadership. Neuroticism, defined as a lack of self-esteem, was ranked the lowest personality trait for successful leadership. Other scholars reported that successful leadership is positively associated with cheerful, socially outgoing, and assertive personal characteristics (Guerin et al., 2011).

Other scholars believe conflict and adversity like childhood bullying in early life experiences may affect leadership by helping with the development of self-awareness and approaches to leadership (Janson, 2008). From hardship, leaders may develop self-knowledge, sensitivity and compassion, limits of control, and flexibility (Gonzalez,

2010), developments most likely to occur when a leader reflects upon and learns from their hardships and traumatic experiences (Moxley & Pulley, 2003).

Summary of the stream and connection to study. Women bullying survivors may have experienced the psychological, educational, economic, and career effects, initiated by their childhood bullying experiences, that influence their approach to leadership. These women may have experienced or continue to experience workplace bullying in addition to their childhood experiences. As a result of their bullying experiences, their empathy, transformative potentiality, and transformative intentions may be affected. They may also have posttraumatic growth. As highlighted in this stream, some of the described outcomes have a prosocial nature whereby an individual seeks to help others or becomes more oriented to others. Hence, the second stream in this review explores emotionality, which is followed by the third stream exploring prosocial leadership.

Stream 2: Emotionality

The second stream of this literature review explores emotionality. Pahl (2015) described emotionality as "a transformational force that carries one out of oneself and to a different self" (p. 1457) that "puts things or people at odds with themselves" (p. 1458). This description seems to be consistent with the literature described earlier in this review indicating emotional outcomes like depression and shame may cause victims psychological struggle yet may result in a transformative force that prompts change and growth. As such, this stream describes in further detail the prosocial emotion of empathy as well as how the theory of emotional intelligence is used as a method to understand and

measure emotion. This stream also links emotionality to leadership, providing a foundation for the third stream, specifically on prosocial leadership.

Prosocial behavior and motivations for prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior, like empathy and altruism, is defined as behavior that benefits another individual (Clarke, 2005). Individuals exhibiting prosocial behavior may be motivated by their personal gain from the behavior, also known as "egoism" (Clarke, 2005). Individual motivations may not necessarily be solely selfish or self-centered, but the core of the motivation comes from personal gain, for example, the individual who donates money to a nonprofit so the nonprofit may benefit from increased programming benefits from tax incentives. Cialdini and Kenrick (1976), however, proposed that prosocial behavior is a result of wanting to avoid feeling negative feelings in what they termed as the "negative state relief model." Individuals are prosocial to avoid the negative emotions that may come from not helping such as guilt or remorse (Cialdini et al., 1987). For example, an individual may allow an elderly person to assume their seat on a bus because they do not want to feel the guilt imposed by other passengers' judgments.

Other scholars contend that individuals may also be motivated by altruism, a desire to help others without personal gain or perhaps a loss. Batson and Shaw (1991) proposed the altruism-empathy model, which suggested that individuals act prosocially because they are empathic and may feel another's negative emotions. Individuals therefore want to help those who may be experiencing negative emotions to reduce any of their negative feelings. Yet other scholars contend that prosocial behavior is a result of the opposite motivation. Individuals are altruistic because they want to experience the joy resulting from helping, which is known as the empathic-joy hypothesis (Smith, K.D.,

Keating, & Stotland, 1989). While motivations are not explicitly examined within the previously described studies on bullying outcomes (Frazier et al., 2013; Mathiassen, 2013; Perren, Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Malti, & Hymel, 2012; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008), these studies provide evidence of an empathic response to the bullying experience.

Empathy. The origins of the concept of empathy seem to appear in 18th century philosophy, as Hume (1777/1921) stated, "sympathy, we shall allow, is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us" (p. 35). In this early work, Hume was referring to the concept of empathy, although he labeled it sympathy. In more recent literature, there appear to be varying definitions of empathy. Some scholars divide empathy into two categories: affective and cognitive (Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009). Affective empathy refers to the ability to *feel* what another feels and begins to develop in early childhood. Cognitive empathy is to be able to *understand* what another feels and begins to develop later in childhood (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009). Other definitions of empathy include adopting the posture or physical characteristics of another, imagining oneself in another's situations, imagining what another is thinking or feeling, or even feeling suffering or pain when witnessing another person experience suffering or pain (Batson, 2009). The definitions are reminiscent of the long-term effects of bullying described by Mathiassen (2013) and outcomes of trauma described by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996).

While empathy may be generally viewed as a favorable characteristic, this direction toward the other may also be a threat to the empathic individual. Tone and Tully (2014) described empathy as a "risky strength." They contend, through a review of existing literature, that empathy may place an undue burden on the empathic individual

because it may result in depression and anxiety for certain individuals who internalize others' distress. They note the importance of developing empathic skills, but also recommend a level of caution. This may be especially relevant for women, as girls are more likely to be more empathetic and experience empathic distress than boys (Smith, R.L., & Rose, 2011).

Empathy and bullying. Empathy may be an important predictor of bullying behaviors, as bullies are less likely to have well developed empathic skills (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2007). Low empathy is also related to violent bullying behaviors of boys and relational bullying of girls (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Similarly, victims of relational bullying were found to have lower abilities to recognize emotion (Woods, Wolke, Nowicki, & Hall, 2009). Bullying victims were also found to have less ability to manage and control emotions as well as to use emotions in decision making (Lomas, Stough, Hansen, & Downey, 2012).

Emotional intelligence. Empathy is one of several constructs within the broader concept of emotional intelligence (EI). Gardner (1983) provided one of the earliest presentations of EI within the literature through his theory of multiple intelligences proposing intelligence can be measured beyond cognitive and through six different categories. One of these categories is personal intelligence, which is most aligned with the current theory of EI. Personal intelligence is divided into interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence:

> is access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior. (Gardner, 1983, p. 239)

Intrapersonal intelligence is “the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions” (Gardner, 1983, p. 239).

Many scholars regard leadership thought leader Goleman (1999) for popularizing EI within the practitioner literature. As Goleman stated, “in a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels” (Goleman, 1999, p. 8). The two minds he described are more commonly termed intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EI). In doing so, he proposed that mental ability should not be determined by IQ or EI, but by a combination of both. For example, consider the individual who is highly adept academically, but may not be able to carry a conversation at a party and the socialite who may lack the ability to learn and understand basic concepts. Each of them excels mentally, but in two diametrically opposed ways. Thus, Goleman proposed that a more holistic assessment considering both EI and IQ abilities may provide a better assessment of intelligence.

Scholars contributed the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI) to measure an individual’s emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 2006; Bar-On, Brown, Kirkcaldy, & Thomé, 2000). The EQI measures an individual’s (a) interpersonal skills defined as self-awareness; (b) stress management defined as emotional management; (c) adaptability defined as change management, general mood defined as self-motivation; and (d) intrapersonal skills defined as empathy (Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, 2015). In one study using the EQI, researchers found that “women have significantly better interpersonal skills than men while the latter have better

stress tolerance and perhaps impulse control than their female counterpart" (Bar-On et al., 2000, p. 1111).

Yet some scholars have criticized Goleman and Bar-On's contribution to the discussion about emotional intelligence. In *Emotional Rescue: A Conversation with Neal Ashkanasy*, EI researcher and scholar Ashkanasy pointed to Goleman's background in journalism and perhaps a lack of merit of his emotional intelligence work (Ashkanasy, & Rush, 2004). Ashkanasy also noted how Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory is personality-focused, not emotion-focused, hinting at challenges with the validity of the tool as an accurate assessment of EI (Ashkanasy & Rush, 2004).

Ashkanasy (2005a, 2005b) supports the Mayer, DiPaolo, and Salovey (1990) theory of emotional intelligence, which is focused on ability, not personality. Mayer et al. (1990) described emotional intelligence as perceiving, understanding, managing, and facilitating emotion. Perceiving emotion is how well an individual can recognize how other individuals may feel, which closely aligns with the description of empathy provided in this review. Understanding emotions is defined as the ability to describe an emotion and its various components. Managing emotions is defined as an individual's ability to allow emotions to affect or not affect them given the circumstances. Lastly, facilitating emotion is defined as an individual's ability to use emotion for a desired outcome (Mayer et al., 1990).

EI's utility for leadership. As Goleman (1999) stated "a new competitive reality is putting emotional intelligence as a premium in the workplace and in the marketplace" (p. 149). Caruso and Salovey (2004) added EI allows leaders to use "the power of the

emotion as a springboard to a successful outcome" (p. 25). This is due to the increasing evidence that EI may be an important leadership characteristic.

In fact, individuals with a higher EI may be viewed as leaders even if there is no identified leader (Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010). Emotional intelligence competency also predicted higher levels of success compared to other leader competencies (Boyatzis, 2006). EI may also predict effective female manager performance. Women who demonstrated sensitivity to their subordinates' emotions and provided emotional support were rated higher by their subordinates (Byron, 2007). This outcome, however, may be at least partially attributable to ongoing socially constructed expectations for women in the workplace, where women are expected to be more emotional and sensitive (Byron, 2007).

Within a global context, EI combined with cultural intelligence may support more effective leadership (Alon & Higgins, 2005), not to suggest that EI is the only predictor of successful leadership. Rather, it suggests effective and successful leaders demonstrate both EI and cognitive intelligence, which may be due to EI and cognitive intelligence working complementarily to support performance (Côté & Miners, 2006).

Ongoing arguments. Although there is support for EI's contributions to leadership in the literature, there also appears to be evidence that does not support EI's utility for leadership. For example, Weinberger (2009) found no association between managers' EI and their effectiveness when using the Mayer-Solovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. Similarly, F.E. Brown, Bryant, and Reilly (2006) found no association between effective leader behavior and EI using the EQI. Regardless of the contradictions, there seems to be more evidence in favor of EI's utility for effective

leadership. Walter, Cole, and Humphrey (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of literature and found a significant amount of supporting evidence for EI across leader emergence, effectiveness, and leadership behavior.

There is also a debate as to EI's relevance and scholarly foundations. Some of the criticisms include Landy (2005) who claimed that corporate interests had propelled EI forward as an important leadership theory versus scientific studies and is not scientifically sound. Antonakis, in an article by Antonakis, Ashkanasy, and Dasborough (2009) added to this argument by noting the lack of testing and consistency for EI constructs, concluding that EI may serve an important role for leadership; but it needs more scientific testing to prove a reliable and valid measure.

Emotions and female leaders. Specifically examining the emotional dimension of leadership, women leaders encounter stereotypes and biases. There are commonly held stereotypes in society that women are more emotional than men and that they should express only positive emotions like joy (Shields, 2013). Women leaders are also expected to be careful of displaying the right amount and right types of positive emotion (Brescoll, 2016), which presents a problem, as they "may have difficulty exercising power in that they cannot display the primary emotions that convey power (i.e., anger and pride) without incurring penalties" (Brescoll, 2016, p. 423). Such "penalties" when displaying negative emotions, or those that are socially expected, include being less deserving of power, less hirable, and less competent (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Demonstrating the penalties, women managers were found to be less favored than male managers because women were viewed by both male and female subordinates as "catty," "emotional," and "bitchy," among other negative attributes (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). As

outcomes of these gender-based biases, women leaders may experience "decreases in motivation and engagement" within their positions and approach to leadership (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 389).

Summary of the stream and connection to study. The research demonstrates bullying victimization results in an emotional response, whether empathic or other prosocial behaviors. When studying the experience of leading by a survivor of childhood bullying, it may be helpful to understand the potential motivations behind their emotions, challenges specifically for women, and the utility of the related emotions. EI provides a framework for understanding leaders' potential affective leadership abilities.

Stream 3: Prosocial Leadership

As described in the first and second streams of this literature review, childhood bullying victimization may result in posttraumatic growth that includes prosocial empathic and altruistic behaviors. Prosocial behaviors may be helpful or a "risky strength" (Tone & Tully, 2014); however, prosocial behaviors within the context of leadership and leadership development have been documented as useful leadership behaviors. This stream expands upon the concept of EI and its supporting prosocial constructs of empathy and altruism within the context of leadership. This stream also describes how prosocial leadership constructs inform leader characteristics and behaviors.

Empathy, altruism, and leadership. Considerable literature exists on EI's connecting constructs of empathy, altruism, and leadership. Bell and Hall (1954) were the first to report a significant relationship between empathy and successful leadership. Bell and Hall (1954) wrote that leaders may need to be able "to identify those situations and personal characteristics that make the leader able to satisfy or at least appear to

satisfy the group needs" (p. 157). This claim is also apparent in more recent scholarly literature. Empathy allows the manager or leader to view "a situation from an angle different than what is usual or natural for the manager" (Somogyi, Buchko, & Buchko, 2013, p. 35). Then the leader may anticipate the needs, emotions, and thoughts of their followers and strategize accordingly. Moreover, there may be a significant relationship between levels of empathy and performance of leaders, demonstrating that empathic skills may be an important predictor of leadership success (Sadri, Weber, & Gentry, 2011).

Within a global leadership setting, empathy also becomes an important characteristic to facilitate understanding and relationships with individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Pedersen & Pope, 2010) and is valued within educational leadership settings (Undung & De Guzman, 2009). Conversely, an empathic approach may specifically limit women leaders to only certain types of leadership roles. Scholars contend that "people seem to veer toward selecting women leaders in times of crisis" (Vongas & Al Hajj, 2015, p. 6) and women are more likely to be assigned to crisis leadership situations termed "glass cliffs" due to their empathic abilities.

Similar to empathy, altruism has been documented as an important behavior within organizational settings. Altruism facilitates organizational learning as "it can help build affective and emotional connections with others more easily, encouraging the creation of healthy working relationship" (Guinot, Chiva, & Mallén, 2015, pp. 102-103). Moreover, an altruistic approach within an organization helps build organizational commitment and strong human and social capital within organizations (Haynes, Josefy,

& Hitt, 2015). Conversely, altruism may discourage productivity because workers feel less of a threat of being fired (Dur & Tichem, 2015).

A connection may exist between altruism and organizational leadership. Altruistic individuals "were more respected, held in higher esteem, and were more likely to be chosen as group leaders" (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006, p. 1411). At the highest levels within an organization, altruistic CEOs may have better organizational outcomes than those who are greedy (Haynes et al., 2015). Greedy CEOs are more likely to focus on short-term outcomes, take bigger risks, and focus on wrongdoing within the organization, resulting in potentially poorer outcomes (Haynes et al., 2015).

Prosocial leadership constructs. For the purposes of this literature review, the term "prosocial leadership" is used broadly to describe a general approach to leadership and also an identified leadership theory. As Lorenzi (2004) described, prosocial leadership has:

> a positive, effective influence, with constructive goals that serve the common good. The leader's intentions, vision and goals are positive ("pro"); they create or add value. The leader is also capable of implementing – not just articulating the need for – change. The leader manages, follows through, delivers. The leader's actions attend to the needs of a broader group ("social") rather than to limited, personal interests. (p. 282)

Lorenzi (2004) added that key constructs of prosocial leadership are pursuing goals for the betterment of followers and outcomes that reach a broad population (Lorenzi, 2004).

Goals for betterment of followers. Overlaying the two constructs on existing leadership models provides an expanded view of prosocial constructs throughout the literature on leadership. Burns's (1978) transformative leadership theory, later adapted by Bass and termed transformational leadership theory, requires that "the transforming

leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (p. 4). Bass (1985) reaffirmed this description by noting that "individualized consideration" and "a developmental and individualistic orientation towards their subordinates" (p. 33) is necessary for transformative leadership. Northouse (2015) summarized by including the affective dimension of transformative leadership, noting that transformative leadership is "concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals" (p. 61).

Empirically, researchers have documented transformational leadership as a successful approach to supporting an organization on multiple levels. Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, and Liu (2008) found that it increases followers' commitment to change. Transformational leadership also increases the organizational commitment, work engagement among men and women and overall success in the workplace (Farahani, Taghadosi, & Behboudi, 2011). This approach to leadership has also been shown to bolster human resource management within an organization (Pereira & Gomes, 2012).

An authentic leadership approach has similar altruistic goals, as authentic leaders focus on the development of followers and their organizations (Khilji, Keilson, Shakir, & Shrestha, 2015). George (2004) described of authentic leadership, "leaders genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership [and] they are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money, or prestige for themselves" (Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 1). This approach does not mean that the authentic leader never seeks power, money, or prestige for selfish reasons, but the authentic leader is focused on providing these outcomes and others to his or her followers. Inherent in an authentic approach is "heightened contextual awareness, a

strong sense of purpose, and self-transcendent values" (Khilji et al., 2015, p. 19) to transform the people within their organizations.

Broad outcomes . As Lorenzi (2004) described, prosocial leaders also seek broad outcomes that benefit a large group of people, not just the leader. A desire to create broad outcomes can be viewed through Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership model. The central elements of distributed leadership are that all involved with a project or change effort are focused on leadership, leadership is a product of the interactions among leaders and followers, and the situation will determine how leadership is practiced. Distributed leadership does not focus on the individual leader, but on the leader and follower collective unit, acknowledging the limitations of a single person and the involvement and power of a collective (Hairon & Goh, 2015; Spillane, 2006). Similarly, an authentic leadership approach also has broad outcomes. Authentic leadership has been shown to reduce the likelihood of burnout and job dissatisfaction or increase team commitment and employee satisfaction (Darvish & Rezaei, 2011; Spence Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2012).

Summary of stream and connection to the study. Empathy and altruism are documented as important leadership characteristic to support leader performance in general and organizational performance. Prosocial leadership both broadly encompasses well-known and regarded leadership theories and as Lorenzi's (2004) theory, relying on an altruistic approach. Similarly, participants in this study seemed to use a prosocial leadership approaches which were empathic and altruistic and resembled aspects of well-known leadership theories.

Summary

This literature review explored three views related to this study about the lived experiences of women leaders who are survivors of childhood bullying. The first view described bullying's immediate and life-long psychological, educational, or economic outcomes. This view also provided a window into some of the documented transformative outcomes of bullying victimization such as increased prosocial behaviors including altruism and empathy. The second view explored emotionality, empathy as a construct of emotionality, and emotional intelligence as an additional method for measuring intelligence. It also touched on women's emotions within the context of leadership. This view provides a psychological introduction into characteristics bullying victims have reported in studies about bullying and traumatic experiences, the roles of emotional intelligence, and emotion in leadership. The third view describes two central prosocial leadership constructs and relates these constructs to several prominent leadership theories. This view described the relationship between prosocial behaviors and leadership. Together, the three views provide a primer for the experiences of women leaders who were bullied as children.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women leaders who were survivors of childhood bullying victimization and their beliefs about how childhood bullying may have influenced their approach to leadership. This was accomplished by addressing the following research questions through a phenomenological exploration:

1. What are the lived experiences of women leaders who experienced childhood bullying victimization?
2. How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied in childhood describe their approach to leadership?
3. How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied describe their challenges and successes while leading?

This chapter describes my positionality, the study's design and rationale, population, site, research methods, and ethical considerations.

Positionality

As a childhood bullying survivor, I am very familiar with this study's topic. Elementary school was a difficult period of my life, as I recall being bullied frequently during this time. My third-grade peers often encircled me on the school bus, taking turns calling me names. I do not recall what they said, but I do remember longing to escape. I recall the incredibly lonely feeling that resonated in my gut when my peers literally

turned their backs to me, leaving me without a single soul to talk to during the school day.

The frequency of these events decreased in middle school and high school, but remained as a constant threat. I recall the recurrent laughter from the boy who sat behind me in seventh grade as he made joke after joke about me to the other classmates. I remember the occasional booming threat from the girl across the hall in high school as I tried to avoid eye contact and found refuge in a classroom. Throughout elementary, middle and high school, I constantly felt like I was on guard and wanted to avoid being a target as my self-confidence suffered.

Upon graduation, I reluctantly enrolled at the local university per my overbearing big brother who did not want to see his little sister flounder. The same brother then encouraged me to join a sorority. During my second year of college, my reality changed dramatically. I was elected to a leadership position in my sorority and was shocked. I was so surprised that I could have this type of power and that people actually wanted to listen to me. I think I had allowed myself to be oppressed for most of my childhood and adolescence that I struggled to believe anyone would want to follow to me. However, by graduation, I was a respected and known leader on my university campus, which gave way to my early career success.

Despite the success, I believe I sometimes struggle with confidence and interpersonal relationships. Colleagues have described me as a perfectionist, not knowing that this approach is sometimes due to a fear of judgment by my supervisors and colleagues, similar to the judgment I experienced as a child. I am worried I may let them down or they may think poorly of me, so I strive to ensure a flawless work product.

Colleagues have also described me as empathic, considering others' feelings and being able to relate well. I take this approach because I could not imagine treating anyone as I was treated or using my power as a leader to mistreat others. Admittedly, I do not believe such approaches are a complete direct result of my bullying experiences. I can recall many professional experiences that have contributed to my work ethic and empathy. However, I do know that the emotions and thoughts associated with these approaches are undoubtedly similar to those I first experienced as a child.

As a researcher who is a woman, a leader, and someone who lived through childhood bullying, I bring inherent bias to my research. I am aware of how bullying victimization experiences, professional experiences, and formal education have influenced my approach to leadership. I simultaneously appreciate the outcomes, but believe the motivation to pursue excellence and understand people could have been learned without the torment of a bully. I also fully acknowledge that I anticipated that my participants would describe similar approaches borne out of similar childhood and adult experiences.

Given this awareness and these assumptions, I embedded a researcher journal into the design of this study so I could actively reflect on my experience, thoughts, and reflections about the similarities and differences between my participants and me during data collection. When interpreting the data, I used my reflections from the journal to help me set aside my personal experiences and biases so I could explore lived experiences from as much of a neutral perspective as possible. A detailed description about the journals and related data collection and analysis is provided in a subsequent section in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

This study relied on a phenomenological design that explored the "phenomenon and the intentional relations that manifest and appear" (Vagle, 2014, p. 27). This type of design is interested in how people are connected with the world around them or what Vagle (2014) termed "intentionality." Exploring intentionality requires participants to "return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). This collection of experiences is then pieced together to define the overlaps between individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and the collective description of those overlaps.

Within phenomenology, various interpretations indicate how to approach the method. This study relied on a hermeneutical approach that Vagle (2014) described as being in "an ever-circulating motion that can come back to, remake, do and undo itself" (p. 31). In this way, the phenomenon is not like an onion to be peeled back and examined, but rather a kaleidoscope that presents differently dependent upon the view and position of its parts. Participant reflection and introspection contribute to and may re-define the description of the phenomenon.

For this study, I used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of other women like me and to describe the lived experience that is so intimately tied to each of their lives (Van Manen, 2014). Inherent in this approach is a social constructivist perspective. Constructivism relies on "meaning-making" of women who were bullied (Lincoln, 2005). Women who were bullied reflected on "physical and temporal data" to describe their knowledge of the phenomenon in question (Lincoln, 2005, p. 60). My study sought to "recover a fuller and richer description of social life as

it is experienced" (Lincoln, 2005, p. 60) by women leaders who were bullied. It was based on their descriptions of their views and their world as they have constructed it.

Population and Site Description

The target population for this study comprised seven mid-career women within the United States who self-identified as leaders in either a community or professional setting and as survivors of childhood bullying victimization. The study did not require an ethnic or cultural composition and these characteristics were not requested from participants. Other factors such as bullying duration, leadership duration, and education were not considered for eligibility, but were determined during the study. Study eligibility was determined during the participant invitation phase of the study.

Site Selection

I recruited participants from online sites that serve women leaders. These sites included Facebook, LinkedIn, Drexel University's Alumni Network, The Sacramento Metro Chamber, as well as referrals from colleagues and friends.

Research Methods

Description of Methods

The interview is a primary data collection vehicle for phenomenological researchers. Vagle (2014) suggested that phenomenological researchers consider additional data collection methods dependent upon the phenomenon under exploration. As such, this study relied on two data collection methods: interviews and journals. Figure 1 depicts the methodology.

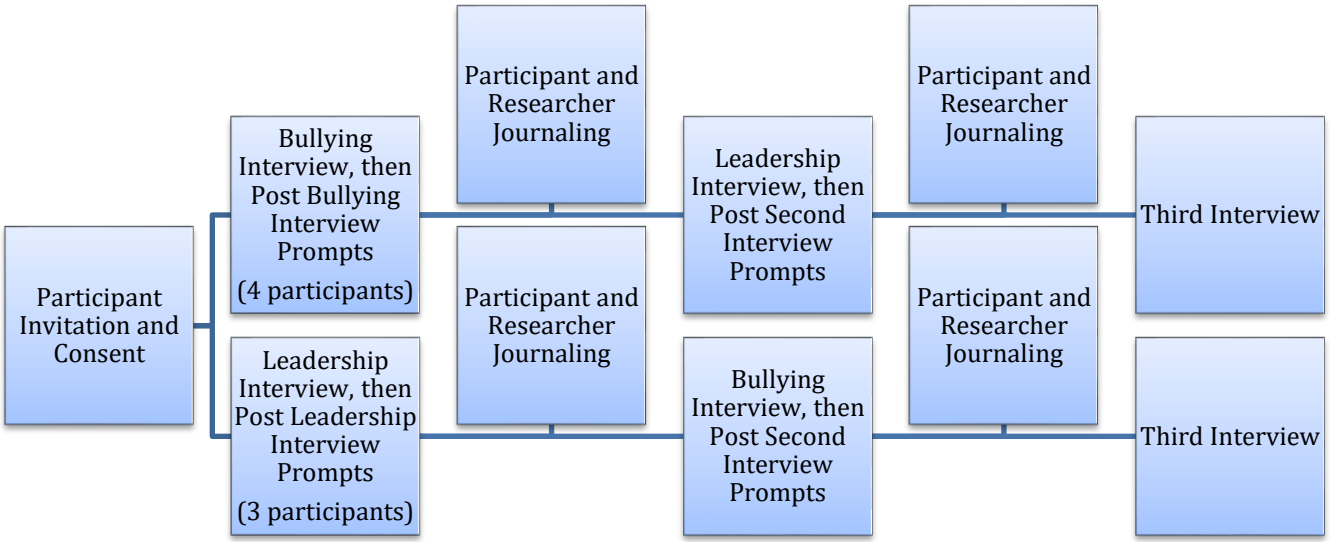

Figure 2. Methodology. This depicts the interview protocol and journal prompt sequencing.

Participant identification and invitation. The following invitation procedure was conducted for the entire study population. I posted three announcements on my LinkedIn page, posted three announcements on my Facebook page, and sent two colleagues study descriptions to send within their respective networks. Ten prospective individuals expressed interest in the study. I then emailed each prospective participant a formal study invitation that included study details about eligibility criteria, what would occur during the study, anticipated time, and any known risks (see Appendix A). I followed up with three prospective participants who expressed interest and did not respond to my initial formal invitation by sending each prospective participant one or two additional two emails. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were emailed consent paperwork and study details prior to the first interview. I asked each study participant to read the consent paperwork and verbally confirm their interest in participating prior to the first interview.

Interviews. I then collected data through three, 40-75-minute, semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interview series relied on the Seidman (2013) interview protocol in which:

> the first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience, the second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context which it occurs, and the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences holds for them. (p. 20)

Interview topics. Each interview had a distinct topic and approach. The childhood bullying interview explored the participants' childhood bullying experiences. The leadership interview explored leadership experiences. The combined third interview

explored both leadership and childhood bullying experiences. Each interview included five minutes for general opening remarks and five minutes for closure and debriefing.

Interview sequences. I conducted interviews one to four weeks apart. During the first interview session, I reviewed the consent paperwork and asked for verbal consent to participate. I then divided participants into two groups. Four participants participated in the interview about childhood bullying experiences then the interview about leadership experiences, concluding with the third interview regarding both of these experiences. The three participants in the second interview group participated in the interview about leadership, then childhood bullying, and then the third interview regarding both experiences. I conducted the three-series interview protocol face-to-face interviews with five participants and conducted remote video conference interviews with two participants. Four face-to-face participants participated in the first group, and one face-to-face participant and two remote video conference participants participated in the second group (see Figure 2).

Rationale for interview sequence. I divided participants into two groups because I wanted to know if discussing bullying or leadership would provide different participant descriptions in subsequent interviews. I found there were no differences in participant descriptions between those who began with the bullying interview compared to those beginning with the leadership interview.

Instrument description. The bullying interview used an eight-question semi-structured protocol directly related to participants' bullying experiences. The leadership interview used a nine question semi-structured protocol related to participants' leadership

experiences. The third interview used a four question semi-structured protocol (see Appendix B for all interview protocols).

Data collection. During the first semi-structured interview, I asked participants each question from the protocol and also diverted from the protocol as needed. The second interview was semi-structured using the question prompts in the journals as the basis for the interview protocol. Again, I asked protocol questions and diverted from the protocol as needed. The third interview used the semi-structured interview protocol. Again, I asked protocol questions and diverted from the protocol as needed.

Each interview was recorded using two devices. The face-to-face interviews were recorded using two audio devices. The video conferenced interviews were recorded using one audio device and the video conference software.

Journals and prompts. I offered each participant a journal, either paper or electronic depending on their preferences. Five of the seven participants selected a paper journal. One participant who received a journal did not participate in the journal activity. One participant selected a paper journal, but then provided typed and printed journal entries. One participant did not select a paper journal and provided electronic responses. In addition to participant journals, I maintained a journal about my experiences during the data collection phase. I also recorded my journal responses in a paper journal.

Instrument description. Each participant journal contained pre-determined reflective prompts that had similar questions as the protocol for the second interview. I encouraged participants to use any method they deemed appropriate to respond to the prompt including any type of writing (bullet points, paragraphs, key words, poetry, etc.) or drawing.

Data collection. Each participant received journal prompts immediately after the first interview dependent upon the first interview topic. If the participant discussed bullying during the first interview, the participant received the "Post Bullying Interview Prompts." If the participant discussed leadership during the first interview, the participant received the "Post Leadership Interview Prompts." After second interviews, all participants received the "Post Second Interview Prompts" (see Appendix C)..

During each interview, I kept notes on follow-up questions, significant phrases, and facial expressions. These notes were kept on the right side of my researcher notebook. I heeded the advice of Vagle (2014), paying attention to how I felt, and on the left, wrote key words, thoughts, and ideas during the interview. After the interview, I also immediately reflected on the experience and documented key reflections, words, and follow-up questions. The intention of my journal was to support the study's reflexivity and its phenomenological approach.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview recordings were transcribed using electronic software. I then reviewed the transcripts for accuracy by comparing them to the original recordings. I added additional details to the transcriptions that would enhance data collection, such as long pauses or tone of voice. I also converted participant and research journal entries into electronic files for analysis.

As Van Manen (2014) stated, "None of the work of the leading proponents of the phenomenological tradition would be commensurate with abstracting, coding, and procedural approaches; developing taxonomies; looking for recurring concepts or themes; and so on" (Chapter 11, Section 7, para. 2). Instead, phenomenology requires the

researcher to set aside biases and presumptions about a phenomenon (epoche) and see the phenomenon as if it was the first time (reduction). Then a researcher looks to describe an ever-evolving phenomenon. As such, I analyzed data from 21 participant interviews using Van Manen's (2014) three stages for theme analysis. The first stage is to describe the significance of an entire passage of the transcripts in a phrase. During the second phase, I read the transcripts several times and determined which sentences stood out. These sentences were essential to the phenomenon or revealed something about the phenomenon. During the third and final stage, I looked at every sentence and determined how the sentence related to the phenomenon in question. I then compiled the analyses from these three stages to determine themes. In addition to these stages, I used in vivo and versus coding on the transcripts.

Stages of Data Collection

This study occurred over a period of 10 months. Table 1 illustrates the timeline.

Table 1

Study Timeline

Stage	Date	Description
Stage 1 – IRB Approval	August 2016	Appropriate permissions were granted to conduct this study through Drexel's IRB.
Stage 2 – Participant Recruitment and Consent	August – November 2016	Participants were recruited from the sources described above. Participants were introduced to the research and provided consent to participate in the study.
Stage 3 – Data Collection	September 2016 – January 2017	Interview series were conducted.
Stage 4 – Data Analysis and Reporting	October 2016 – May 2017	Data were transcribed, analyzed, and compiled into a written report and reviewed by peers.

Quality

According to Tracy (2010), there are eight measures to determine quality qualitative research including rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and resonance. I achieved rigor through adequate data collection. I conducted interviews over a span of four months enduring adequate time for data collection from each participant. Moreover, I gathered extensive data through multiple interactions lasting 40 to 75 minutes each. In total, I interacted with each participant for at least 120 minutes and up to 195 minutes.

I also practiced self-reflexivity to contribute to the study's sincerity (Tracy, 2010). Self-reflexivity within the context of phenomenology can also be termed as "bracketing" when the researcher takes an introspective and reflective approach to their personal

experiences while researching. I achieved sincerity by using my researcher's journal to document my experiences during the study, compare my experiences to my participants' experiences, and provide an outlet for any additional thoughts I may have had during the study.

I achieved resonance through the aesthetic presentation of the data by providing rich and extensive data about participants. The participant journal added to the aestheticism by allowing the participants to explore their thoughts and emotions deeper and provide these descriptions to me. The rich data are presented in the following chapters.

In addition to these quality measures, I conducted member checks with each participant by providing them copies of their "participant profile" so they could comment on accuracy and representation. The study underwent extensive peer review by a dissertation committee and other scholars who are experts with phenomenology and the study topics. Peers were asked to provide "honest and open feedback about [the researcher's] actions throughout the study" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 303). The study was refined multiple times based on peer feedback.

Ethical Considerations

This study obtained approval from Drexel University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to implementation. IRB approval required documentation on the study's detailed research procedures, ethical considerations, and human subject protections. This study did not have any planned benefits for participants, although participants described benefits during the third interview. The only known cost was approximately five hours of each participant's time. Through exploration of the

participants' experiences, I intended to advance knowledge and benefit leadership policy and practice.

All participant data were handled carefully, confidentially, and with sensitivity. Consent paperwork provided to each participant disclosed the nature of the study and described the confidentiality of participant data during and after the study. Participants consented verbally to participating in the study and were aware they may have discontinued their participation at any time. I kept consent paperwork, recordings, notes and any other related documentation in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of women leaders to understand how surviving childhood bullying may have influenced their leadership in current professional roles. This chapter introduces each participant through a profile describing her childhood, childhood bullying experiences, adult aggression experiences, and adult leadership experiences. These profiles provide an evidentiary base for subsequent discussions in this chapter on findings, results, and interpretations.

Group Characteristics

The seven participants in this phenomenological study were between 40 and 55 years old. They were all college educated with six of the seven attaining Master's and Doctoral degrees. Most of the participants described that they experienced childhood bullying throughout primary and secondary schooling. All participants described themselves as leaders within their current professional roles, self-identifying that they had 20 or more years of leadership experience. Six of the seven worked in non-profit settings. Table 2 provides an overview of each participant's years of formal leadership, primary professional roles, education level, and the timeframe in childhood when they reported being bullied.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Participant	Years of Formal Leadership	Primary Professional Role	Education Level	Childhood Bullying Timeframe
Loretta	20+ years	Manager, Government Agency	Master's Degree	Elementary until Eighth Grade
Adela	20+ years	Executive Director, Charitable Non-Profit	Doctorate	Elementary Through High School
Roxy	20+ years	Manager, Charitable Non-Profit	Master's Degree	Elementary Through High School
Sarah	20+ years	Executive, Non-Profit Private University	Master's Degree, Current Doctoral Student	Elementary Through High School
Jill	20+ years	Event Manager, For-Profit	Bachelor's Degree	Eighth Grade
Carla	20+ years	Superintendent, Non-Profit School District	Doctorate	Elementary Through High School
Carrie	20+ years	Professor, Non-Profit Private University	Doctorate	Middle School

Note: This table provides a summary of *years of leadership,* participant professions, *and* bullying duration.

Participant Profiles

Loretta

Childhood and bullying victimization. Based on her descriptions of her family life, Loretta "didn't really have a childhood." Her mother was addicted to drugs, in and

out of jail, and was physically abused by the man she married after Loretta's father. Loretta was "always seeking out something better" than her home life.

> I always just knew that this was not a normal life. I just knew that this is not how people live. It's probably because I had really good friends, and I would stay at their houses, and I saw their parents and their life. I'm like, "Yeah, this isn't normal life to have things flying in your house or see your mom's jaw get busted on a nightly basis."

Loretta cared for her younger siblings when her mother was in jail and "bounced around" her relatives' homes when her mother was not in jail. She refused to live with her mother and be in "that life," but her siblings went back to her mother's house. As a result, Loretta described that her mother thought Loretta acted "too good" for her, and her siblings felt "abandoned." Loretta said she "did the best she could" during that time.

Trying to escape issues at home, she often would take the city bus to go to church or anywhere else. School was also a safe place and a haven as teachers "saved her" from what she was experiencing at home. However, to get to school, Loretta had to take the school bus where she experienced bullying frequently.

> Getting on the bus, every day I was bullied. Every day. Spit on. I mean it was always bad, but I . . . I'm going to start crying. I wanted to get to school. That's my safe haven, so I just would sit there and go through it. Then we would get off, and school wasn't as bad. There was still stuff said, but that bus ride is where it was like, "Oh, crap."

Loretta described her reaction to these bullying experiences:

> There was nowhere to cope. You just keep going. I just think that there's a place that I've been able to survive and keep things. It doesn't make sense to continue to bring up stuff that's already passed. I'm sure it does manifest its way [in] places in parts of my life, but I guess I don't give it allowance to.

In middle school, Loretta changed from being a victim of bullying to participating in a group bullying incident toward another student with some of the students who had

previously bullied her. "I was being invited by them, so I was like, ‘that’s kind of cool. I’m finally making a breakthrough in the sixth grade.’ Not that I needed anything to prove, but it just felt nice to be accepted." During this incident, “the cool kids” and she disrobed a girl publicly and left the student “out there naked” near the school. She described that she was immediately very regretful after the experience. Loretta said, "It’s just crazy to be a part of that, knowing that I hurt somebody like that." This was the only time she bullied another child.

While Loretta was bullied throughout elementary school, the bullying stopped in eighth grade.

> I think by then I was a pretty big badass. I learned how to be really hardcore, and I was fighting and sticking up for myself a little bit different. I would say in eighth grade the tables turned a little bit.

Reflections on childhood experiences. Loretta recognized that there were unfortunate experiences in her childhood that no child should endure, but also recognized the lessons learned.

> I think there's bits and pieces definitely nobody needed to go through, but I see children now and I don't think they have the same skillset that I have because they are so sheltered. That's scary. When you're forced to learn something and you're put in an environment where you have to grow up, [it] definitely creates you differently than not having those opportunities.

Approach to leading. Loretta described that her approach to leadership is “what you see is what you get.” When she leads, she shares her opinions and thoughts without hesitation using straightforward language. She described herself as disinterested in small talk and did not believe this interfered with her effectiveness as a leader.

> I believe in just getting down to the work and getting it done, but I'm very caring towards people and I'm kind . . . Just because I'm not a rainbows and sunshine

> good morning type of person all the time doesn't mean that I'm not there for my staff.

She believed as a leader that:

> You're actually in charge of human beings and it's a huge role, that you're in charge of humans' lives, creating and caring and making their work environment healthy and happy. It's not just about getting the goals done. It's not about just business, it's bigger than that.

For Loretta, leadership was about the "power" and rewards that come from developing people professionally. For instance, she believed it was important to train her staff in a way that would allow them to eventually assume her position. She said, "That's a really good feeling to think, 'wow, they're trusting me with their career life,' and to me I think that my biggest reward is when I see people develop and move up."

Leadership challenges and successes. During a challenging yet very rewarding leadership experience, Loretta was hired to fire and replace an entire team whose members were twice her age. She defined this as doing her supervisor's "dirty work" and said it was "not a positive environment." There was gossip and the process was fraught with challenges. Yet, she also viewed this experience as one of her best leadership experiences because she was able to rebuild the team the way she wanted. She brought the "right people into the right jobs" by identifying and appreciating their characteristics, not just their prior titles. She described this position as one of her favorites throughout her career.

Reflections on gender. Comparing her way to how men lead, she said:

> I think everybody's approach is different and I don't think anybody's approach is perfect . . . men are more challenged by my leadership because I don't feed anybody's ego. I don't say "you're awesome" or "thank you" unless you really deserve it.

She described her approach as different from that of her male counterparts because she is focused on helping her staff. She believed her male counterparts are focused on the power gained from positions of leadership.

Adult aggression experiences. Loretta believed she has been bullied within the workplace. "You're bullied into doing things that are against, sometimes, your internal makeup." She was once told by a hiring manager during an interview process exactly how to dress and wear her hair.

> At that time, I didn't think much of it. At that time, I thought she was trying to be helpful, and after working with her a year, I realized that that's a control mechanism to see how she could control you.

Unlike her childhood, as an adult she was not passive in bullying or similar situations and described herself as directly confronting difficult interpersonal situations. "I don't have a good poker face so you know how I feel, and what I'm thinking most of the time" she said. She believed she was always fighting for what she wanted from workplace bullies and others who exerted power over her. She spoke about becoming weary of constantly fighting.

> I mean there's pieces of me that's tired of fighting. I don't know if that just has to do with age because I feel like I've been fighting my whole life for everything. I'm like, "Is it me? Is there something about me that my life is just always in a mode where I have to fight for something?" It's like you have to prove yourself.

Adela

Childhood and bullying victimization. Adela described her family as stable, loving, and supportive during her childhood. She was a smart, driven, and self-aware child. When she was four, she wanted to be a gynecologist and had a 10-year plan for her career development. At the same time, she was very shy. She said "I remember playing

a drum in the Thanksgiving play with my eyes closed because I didn't want to see the crowd."

Adela believed school was a "sanctuary" because she excelled academically and knew what to expect. She was able to skip a grade and was placed in advanced classes. School was, however, the place she was bullied (throughout most of elementary and middle school). She was bullied by teachers who did not believe she should be in advanced classes. "[Mrs. Jones] didn't believe I belonged in the class at first. She would put me in the back and she wouldn't talk to me . . . and she yelled," she said. She was also bullied by other children because she was not like other children intellectually, culturally, and physically.

> I never fit culturally with the black experience. I was extremely articulate. I had a freaking 10-year plan at four. I had all of these. My mother and father were married. My mother ironed our sheets. My life experience was so different from the other kids there. I'd say I was a freaking bull's eye, put it on my back, and shoot because I had every characteristic that didn't fit. I was dark, I was round, and I was really smart. I was a bully's playground.

During bullying incidents, she would cry, never fight back, and "shrink into me." After the bullying incidents, she would cope with self-talk.

> I told myself the story that they're just jealous and one day, I'm going to be this super fabulous person and they're all going to know that it was because of them. I lived for the day that I could get them back by living well. It was, "I'm going to be this kick ass, powerful woman one day that changes the world." That was my motivation. If I could keep saying this, I could make it true. The human mind can convince yourself of anything. I'm glad I had that.

When she was 12, she started to self-soothe by drinking alcohol. By high school, she was drinking up to a fifth of brandy each day and, describing herself in retrospect, considered herself "an alcoholic." "I'd drink at lunch time. I'd drink after school. I'd drink before school," she said. Prior to entering college, though, she quit drinking.

"Twelve was when I started drinking. By the time I was a freshman in college, I was 17, the thrill was gone."

Reflections on childhood experiences. Adela believed her childhood bullying experiences influenced her personal and professional development.

> It shaped so much of who I am. Being able to . . . as I say, develop the empathy, have an understanding, to build that muscle of resilience. I look at a lot of children now who cannot take [it], bullying is almost the end of the world. It taught me that everything ends, it's okay. It'll end.

Approach to leading. Adela described her approach to leadership as a "servant leader" who "has the responsibility to take my gifts and benefit other people." Adela further explained that, as a servant leader, "Sometimes you lead from the front, sometimes you herd people and let them think they're in front, but you still help them get to their end destination." She also described herself as empathetic.

> My ability to empathize with others is intense. I feel everybody's everything. That ability to feel deeply and to fight for the little person is what makes me the leader I am. It provides me empathy when I listen to colleagues, or even my staff . . . I'm very sensitive to making sure everyone is included and having a very flat organization.

At the same time, she tended to intellectualize her responses during challenging leadership situations instead of allowing emotion to drive her responses. She connected this approach to her childhood when she did "not care for confrontation." "Talking's so much easier, and you get more done, and why deal with all these emotion things. Let's make it clean. What are the facts? Let's deal with the facts, and then let's move ahead." She recognized that this approach may irritate some of her followers who are seeking to be heard and not be analyzed or counseled.

Leadership successes. Adela described one of her most successful leadership experiences was when she successfully advocated to regain funding for a county safety net program that provided services for homeless, underserved and low-income individuals. She provided multiple presentations in her county and had all the members of her Board of Supervisors approve the funding. She said "being able to speak for those who don't have that voice is the most rewarding, and when I feel like I'm in my leadership zone."

Adela described her experiences as a child as directly informing her approach to leadership.

> If I wouldn't have gone through all the experience that I had, I would not be the person I am now. I'm so thankful that I had because nobody else could've handled it the way I did and the work I do now is directly informed by what happened then.

Leadership challenges. Adela described a challenging leadership situation when her staff was upset finding Adela was not available because to them, she was too busy. As Adela said:

> I am not always the most attentive person. I try to be, but sometimes not, and so she was telling me her concerns, and I was there and I acknowledged her and like, "Yes you're right. What do you want me to do? You're right." She needed more validation than that, and that's one of the things as a leader is being able to read your staff and reading yourself and knowing when you're doing too much.

Reflections on gender. Adela described herself as different than many women leaders.

> I have met a lot of my women peers, the women that are leaders. A lot of them were the bullies. They were the ones that did the bullying, but were able to tone it down as they got into adulthood."

Adela described her approach to leadership as strategic and passionate, yet "in a stereotypical male way, I'm able to bifurcate from my emotions quickly" by intellectualizing situations. She also believed her approach to leadership was different from that of her male counterparts, because she seeks to build consensus. Her male counterparts say:

> "We've made a decision, let's go, let's make it happen." I'm like, "No, I'm going to make the decision, but I want everybody to buy into the decision that I made" because I think we'll be more effective when that happens.

Adult aggression experiences. Adela has experienced bullying as an adult, but did not define it as bullying until participating in this study. She attributed her ability to recognize adult bullies to her childhood experiences. "I truly believe my experiences as a child and going through them provided me an empathy that I might not have had. Experiencing bullying as a child, allows me to identify it in adult behavior, adults who are bullies."

She recalled feeling similar emotions and physical sensations during a series of adult bullying and "racist" incidents where her superiors tried to "put [her] in her place." Her supervisor gave her unrealistic expectations and when she did not meet them, she was demoted. She felt depressed and gained 75 pounds. Eventually, this situation escalated into a lawsuit that she won.

Roxy

Childhood and bullying victimization. Roxy was poor as a child and grew up in a low-income neighborhood in a large city. Her mother was a single mother of four children and suffered from periodically severe manic-depressive episodes. When Roxy was 13 years old, her mother left Roxy and her siblings with their oldest sister and moved

to Europe for two years. Roxy considers her mother as her "first bully" because she was "mean and aggressive."

Roxy used school as an escape from her home life. "I loved school because home was so bad, so I believed education had always been something that I found as a way out of whatever situation that I was in." She was also bullied at home by her siblings because she liked going to school. "I was the good girl and they bullied me because they felt my mom favored me." At school, she was bullied because she was overweight and because of her family's reputation. "There was a mixture of defending and being ashamed of my family, and so I was made fun of because of my mom and her behavior, and the craziness of our family." Her bullying experiences lasted throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

Roxy coped with the bullying by enduring it, not fighting back, and by trying to confront her bullies verbally.

> I remember as a kid, a kid came up and hit me and I let that kid hit me and hit me and hit me, and then I said, "what have I done that would make you hit me so much?" I questioned it. When I put it back in their laps, I learned it early on, with a bully I put it back in their lap and they can't answer that question. It stops them. It's kind of like, I felt like it embarrasses them. When I found myself backed up in a corner by a bully, instead of retreating or attacking I would allow them to do whatever they were doing, but make sure they knew that I was a human being. I would ask, "why would you want to hurt me?" I don't know where I picked that up, but from an early age I was able to do that. Confront it, instead of walking away from it or fighting it . . . Some people would just go in and fight. I didn't fight because I knew I wasn't going to win. I didn't run because I didn't think I could get away, so I just confronted it.

Reflections on childhood experiences. While during her childhood she did not like being bullied, Roxy recognized how these experiences comprised her personal history. Without them, she would be a "very different person."

> If I had never been bullied, I don't think I'd be the way I am. I like who I am. I like the lens I see the world through. What I've been able to do with it . . . It has impacted how I treat people. It's a good thing.

Approach to leading. Roxy described that her early leadership approach was "like a dictator" "aggressive," "a disciplinarian," and "black and white." She attributed this approach to her insecurities as a young leader. She also described admiring and then being disappointed by a male leader and mentor early in her career.

> This man everyone adored, and everyone wanted to be adored by him, and be led by him. He was charismatic, and at the time, I thought inspirational, and the type of person that you wanted to be on his team, you wanted to do well for him, and I did. I did very well for him, until I didn't, until somebody else came along, and he liked that person better.

She was devastated when she eventually discovered that this mentor was motivated by his ego and "what made him look good and move ahead" she said. "I realized everything I thought a leader was supposed to be wasn't real."

She then started working with a "hippy-dippy" supervisor, Alma, who was not like other leaders within the company. She was younger than Roxy, dressed casually for their for-profit corporate environment, and led differently than her prior supervisor. As a result, Roxy initially questioned Alma's abilities, but eventually recognized that Alma was an outstanding leader.

> I lived in that black and white world. I did come from the hierarchy, you had your hierarchy, so the boss was the boss was the boss, no matter what, and you did what they said no matter what. Mostly it was men, in that type of position, they had only had men directors or leaders. To see a woman, a young woman, who would be a hippy-dippy woman come in and be soft, she was very soft, not aggressive . . . That wasn't her thing, to assert her power. It was different, so I thought it was weak. I fought most of my life, if people came at me with power, with aggression. My mother was very aggressive, very dominant, so to not have somebody be that way, and be kind, and be gentle, and be good, I wasn't used to that . . . [Alma] was real as a leader. She was open as to who she was. She was growing as a leader, and she let us see it. She was very vulnerable. I'd never had

> that before. There were no airs about her. She wasn't competitive. She didn't have that ego. She really cared about people. She looked at the human being first. For her it was about encouraging what was best in the individual, and working with them.

Over time, Roxy learned from Alma, other leaders, and trial and error how she wanted to lead to be a successful leader. Roxy now is focused on her followers and the impact she is making on them.

> I work at finding people's strengths, and getting them to see their own strengths. I say, "Don't do it for me. How does it make *you* feel?" My goal isn't to charm people, but it's to help. For me, the measurement is the imprint, the change that's happened because of whatever I've done, or whatever, whoever I've touched. She also described herself as an empathic leader.
>
> That empathy comes from my experience of being bullied, and having those feelings, and the thought that I would never cause somebody that same feeling is what really keeps me in check. Not to say that I haven't, because I have, but it's really a barometer for me, when I really need to step back. I can see it in [my followers'] body language, I can see it in their face. I can hear it in their answers, and empathize with it so much.

Leadership challenges. Roxy described another pivotal realization about her approach to leading. She was presenting to hundreds of employees on workplace safety and opened her presentation by stating that likely the audience thought this topic "not significant." An audience member raised his hand and said, "she was the only person who thought it wasn't significant." That comment helped her realize she had misread her followers, was limiting herself as a leader, and that it was important to portray the beliefs and behaviors she wanted to see in her followers.

Leadership successes. One of her most successful moments leading was at the charitable non-profit where she currently works helping low-income people in the community. She was leading a group of men. She felt successful because she was able to help them to become excited about their work and about working together.

> They understood the impact that they did together as a team, individually. To me, that's leadership. It wasn't about me, and it wasn't about everything that I did for the team, and them doing, "Hip, hip, hooray, [Roxy]." That was probably one of the happiest days at work I've ever had.

Reflections on gender. Roxy described a difference between the way she leads and a current male counterpart. She described her current male counterpart as "charismatic" and "handsome," but not trusted because he does not take the time to relate to people on a personal level. Because he is focused on power and control, this interferes with developing trust with others. She considered these characteristics as unsustainable. She also described that she has witnessed when women unsuccessfully try a similar approach, because women generally have a different style or are not accepted by men in the workplace. "I've worked in corporate America for so long with men . . . I think what's harder for women is when they try to be like men in the business world."

Adult aggression experiences. Roxy described that she has experienced bullying as an adult and within the workplace.

> I have had a bully in my life for almost all my life, in one way or the other. They just changed. They just grew up to be CEOs and presidents and your boss on the other end, that's intimidated by you.

When she was bullied in the workplace and individuals with higher authority try to exert their power, she had similar physical reactions as when she was bullied as a child. "There's an automatic physical reaction where I get in check, and I go internally." She noted that she becomes quiet, introspective, and does not fight back initially. She eventually recognizes her behavior and tries to respond to the bullying by sharing her thoughts in a professional manner.

Outside of the workplace, Roxy used the same humanizing strategy that she used during her childhood. She described an incident when her neighbor yelled at her for accidentally bumping his truck while she was trying to parallel park.

> He ran out and he was just coming at me, I thought he was going to beat me up. He called me all kinds of names, he was horrible. Oh, man. I was scared because this guy was big . . . He was yelling and screaming at me, so I finally walked up to him and said, I said to him "I don't know what I did for you to hate me so much and say these things that you've said to me, but I must have done something and I'm sorry." And he stopped. He didn't know what to say to me, and he walked away, he was talking under his breath and he walked away, and I went into the house.
>
> The next morning I got up and I was leaving, and he was sitting in his truck behind my car. I thought, well I better talk to him, and I better make sure, you know, again went over and said "I'm sorry I hit your car last night, didn't mean to do it, and again I apologize for whatever I did that got you so angry." The guy looked up at me and he had tears in his eyes, and he said, "I need to apologize to you." He just apologized, he was waiting there to apologize to me.

Sarah

Childhood and bullying victimization. As a child, Sarah endured physical and verbal abuse at home from ages seven to 14. She described that her mother was a "perfectionist" and was very focused on weight. Her stepfather and mother were "narcissistic" and had rules for everything. Among others, there were strict rules for what she could eat, when she could eat, and when she had to be in bed. When she was 15, her stepfather called her "lazy" even though Sarah was enrolled in college courses and correspondence courses in addition to her regular high school courses.

Because she was overweight, she believed there were social rules for overweight girls.

> When I was young, there were definitive rules, particularly for fat girls. There were things you did not do for any reason. Everyone seemed to be well aware of the rules. You did not wear shorts, for instance. You were not outgoing. You just tried to remain invisible.

Sarah described that she was bullied because of her weight and because she was a different ethnicity than her bullies. The bullying included "dismissive comments" like "oh, I don't dance with fat girls," verbal harassment, or physical harm.

> The teacher had left the room for a moment, and [the bully] came in over and threatened me. At that point it was just about power. She had it, I didn't. That was the deal. Then another time, I was walking down the hallway, so I wasn't doing anything to anybody, and basically a guy just punched me in the face, and luckily I was well trained and I didn't stop, because I think it would have been really bad.

She also believed that her teachers bullied her because she "was really smart, bored beyond all reason and comprehension." She coped with the bullying through music.

> That was kind of a way for me to go somewhere else and that helps me. Music is a big part of the way I make sense of the world. If there's something happening, I've got a song, I've got a lyric somewhere.

She also coped by avoiding and not being "involved with the regular course at school" like extracurricular activities and visiting friends.

Throughout her childhood, Sarah felt removed from her surroundings. "I always had this feeling of being on the outside looking in, and it didn't matter whether I was at home, at school, at anywhere, I was always an outsider, never an insider." She also believed she "needed to read people. I never went into a situation without looking at all the angles, figuring out every class . . . Who's the teacher? What's the deal?" When Sarah graduated from high school, she left home and "never looked back."

Reflections on childhood experiences. Sarah described that she does not spend time thinking about her childhood bullying experiences as an adult. "No, I don't spend time on that at all, because what's the point? I was, it is. I made sure my kids weren't." However, she does think "about how different things would have been" had she been able

to “get this weight thing under control.” “It could have been very different. I could have lived a very different life, and I just couldn't do it,” she said.

Approach to leading. Sarah described herself as “a problem solver” and joked, “give me the Middle East and I can solve it by noon.” She also approaches leading by being very flexible, supporting her followers in any way needed.

> I will be whatever kind of manager you need me to be so do you need me to give you step-by-step? I'll die, but I will do it. Do you need me to just say, “I'm here, I need to be there. Go forth and do and you check back?” I can do that.

Yet, this approach seemed to cause her to sometimes overextend herself or take on more work than necessary.

> It's hard sometimes, because I want to make everything better for everybody and I can't always do that. I am a problem-solver, so if I can help somebody I will help them, if it's within my power, but often it's to my own detriment.

In addition to solving problems, she described being dedicated to continuously improving. “I'm always trying to improve. I'm always trying to improve my team. I'm always trying to improve the service we provide.”

Leadership successes. She often had leadership success when she was negotiating deals. One of her most successful times leading was when she quickly resolved a budget negotiation issue for a project. Her team member and client could not agree on a price for the work for over a month, so Sarah scheduled a meeting with the client. Within a matter of 30 minutes, she negotiated the budget with the client and resolved the issue. She was particularly proud of her ability to understand, diagnose, and address the problem effectively.

Leadership challenges. Sarah described one of her most challenging leadership situations during a prior professional role. She was promoted and three of her prior male

colleagues, now subordinates, suddenly changed their behavior. They would “launch offensives” at Sarah, trying to make her look “incompetent and ineffective.”

> I remember [one of them] saying to someone, "Why does everyone always listen to her?" His issue was he was very black and white, he was very judgmental and he had a very much "got you" attitude which, in [a] service organization, you cannot be doing that, whereas I was always, “I'm a problem solver so how can I help you?” . . . At one point, the guy basically suggested that I was lying to staff and, it was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I took him aside and I said, "That can't happen again. You will not undermine me and you certainly will not suggest that I'm lying. I am done," and he kind of said, "Well." I said, "So what's the problem?" He said, "well, I think I should have gotten [your] job."

As a result of the continual struggle with this challenge for three years, Sarah gained 20 pounds, could not sleep, and picked at her fingernails. “I'm a nail biter, that's why I keep polish on them, so instead they were just bloody because I'd pick, pick, pick and they were, for that entire year just bloody on the sides.” She also experienced self-doubt and felt like she did not belong or deserve her leadership position.

> The highs are really high, and sometimes I actually believe I belong where I am, but the lows are incredibly low and it always makes me feel like I don’t belong here. At some point, they're going to figure this out, that one of us is not like the others.

Sarah realized that over time she allowed herself to become isolated as she tried to resolve these issues. She did not seek advice and support from her mentors or past colleagues. Eventually she reached out and received support and the situation improved.

Reflections on gender. While Sarah has worked with mostly men throughout her career, she recently took a job in a woman-dominated organization. Quickly, she realized that the other women she works with approach their work differently.

> They want to talk about fricking everything forever. Which makes me crazy, it's crazy-making. And then I found out, they don't even want to get resolutions. They don't want to. But why would you want to sit around and talk, and not have a decision? . . . In general, I think I prefer working with men, just for the

> efficiency of it. But then on the other hand, I'm learning a lot by working with a team of women. I have to adjust, and I have to adapt.

Adult aggression experiences. Sarah has experienced bullying as an adult, but had not called it bullying until participating in this study. She has coped by compartmentalizing her experiences and being reluctantly agreeable to the situation.

> My reaction's always the same. Pull it in, pull it back, tell them what they want to hear, but it's not all bad, because honestly, I do know what people are thinking. A lot of times, before they know what they're thinking, because I'm always watching. Always watching. Always analyzing. Always evaluating. I never relax.

At the same time, Sarah wanted to change this response.

> I have learned to adapt my behavior to what's acceptable and I live by a very strict code of rules of what's acceptable, what's not acceptable. It's exhausting. Sometimes I just want to say, "Fuck it. I'm not doing this anymore" . . . there's always an internal civil war going on, always. It's like the perfectionist is fighting with the compassionate person, and God knows who will win out on any given day.

Jill

Childhood and bullying victimization. Jill was a very happy child with a supportive family. She was creative and loved theater and music. However, she also lacked self-confidence, which she attributed to her mother, and continues to struggle with this as an adult.

> My mom's just one of those people, and unfortunately, I definitely picked it up, and still do it, where she compares herself to other people, to determine her self-worth, gets jealous of other people . . . And if, whoever it is, the other person, is better or I perceive that they're better in whatever that is, then I get terrified and I clam up.

Her bullying experiences started when her family moved into a small neighborhood. She was bullied by a boy who lived down the street and rode the school bus with her. He would say to her:

> "As soon as we get off this bus, I'm going to beat you up." And I'm like, "Why?" And he's like, "Just shut up, I'm going to beat you up." And we'd get off the bus, and the bus driver would be like, "don't touch her." And the bus driver should have reported him or done something. As soon as the bus would get out of sight, down the road, he'd slam me with his book bag, shove me to the ground, punch me.

Jill coped by "shutting down," running away, crying, and informing her parents. Her parents called the boy's mother to discuss his behavior, but the mother defended her son and blamed Jill. After two years, Jill's family moved away from the neighborhood, which ended the bullying. She said she was never bullied again as a child and considered herself "lucky."

Reflections on childhood experiences. Jill wished she was not bullied as a child. "It's not something that I can look at it and say, 'It made me a stronger person,' or 'It made me realize I shouldn't treat people a certain way.' There's none of that life lesson in there."

Approach to leading. Jill defined her approach to leading as one that is focused on consensus and harmony, but finds this conflicts with her team members' personalities at times. "I've managed creative types, and there's a lot of ego and a lot of fire in there . . . They're not looking for consensus and harmony. They want to win, because it's their creative talent on the line." Jill tried to be:

> . . . the connective tissue that brings these people who are great at what they do, and to bring it all together. I work really hard to make sure that I recognize the people on my team, and I make them feel valued and appreciated.

Leadership challenges. Jill described that she strives for consensus and harmony so much that she may minimize her "own potential to be recognized in the interest of having harmony on the team." She partly attributed this approach to her home life as a child, where arguing was not acceptable and was "devastating." She described

unsuccessful instances in leading when the members of her team were "rude and dismissive." In one incident, a member of a team she was leading said, in front of the entire team, Jill's idea would not work. Jill felt like "it was a blow to [her] ego," but bit her tongue because she has "a tendency, sometimes, in extreme situations to then just speak my mind. I had to let my ego not get in the way of being like, 'No. You're going to listen to me. I'm in charge now.'" She later resolved the issue and now has a close relationship with the team member.

Leadership successes. Jill described being most successful when she implemented an internal national print campaign. One of the company executives did not agree with her approach and would not approve the campaign, despite Jill trying to "do everything to change his mind." Jill then asked her supervisor to intervene, which resulted in gaining approval for the project. Jill's campaign was a huge success and was quickly replicated at the company's international sites. Jill noted with evident pride that when the campaign ended, employees continued to ask about it.

Reflections on gender. Jill has worked in an industry and companies where primarily men hold executive leadership roles. She described that in these settings, women were aggressive to gain promotions and enter these leadership roles.

> In the corporate world, when I was at [ABC Company], I found that a lot of women in leadership roles tended to be incredibly aggressive to the point of almost being mean. It was almost like they felt like, in the marketing world, male dominated, that they had to . . . I don't know. That was their way of making their career or making a name for themselves, is to push their way to the top. They certainly got the titles and the salary and everything, but they left bodies in their wake.

Jill admired one female leader because she was “different.”

> She has this amazing balance of being very savvy, very, very smart, knowledgeable, drives her people to work hard, but does it in a way that she's doesn't leave those bodies in her wake. She can also be fun and have a personality. She's a little bit younger than me, she's a couple years younger than me, which is amazing. From what I can tell, she seeks out opportunities to learn and grow. She’s the first female leader that I've seen that's really been able to balance, again, I don't know how to say it without sounding sexist, coming from such a corporate world, but being able to be a leader and be a boss and to run a multi-billion dollar business unit of a world renowned medical company, but still maintain that female, nurturing, fun spirit. That's what I aspire to.

Adult aggression experiences. Jill did not think she experienced adult bullying until she read the definition in the dictionary during this study and compared it to recent experiences. During the past two and a half years,she shared that her supervisor has bullied her. He has cut her pay, yelled at her and intimidated her and taken work from her for his financial benefit. She said he has a “narcissistic personality disorder,” and has reacted to the bullying by avoiding him. She had emotional and physical reactions and was coping by eating. “I'm constantly sick to my stomach. I lose sleep a lot. I've gained 30 pounds, in the two and a half years that I've been at this job, because I stress eat.”

Carla

Childhood and bullying victimization. As a child, Carla was “always on the outside . . . always on the fringe.” She was very poor and her family moved often to, what she believed, escape financial responsibilities. She was often the new kid at school, wearing thrift store clothes and physically taller than the other kids. Carla was also very shy. “It probably was not until after I was 15 that I looked anywhere but at my feet when I walked anywhere.”

She also had a medical problem that caused her to have urinary issues. This problem was exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about hygiene. Due to these problems, she was bullied from second grade through high school because she often smelled like urine. Students called her names and excluded her from their social groups. Carla's brother also physically bullied her throughout her childhood. She said "the last time he bullied me I was 18 and I had bruises all over my body from it."

She reacted and coped with the bullying by hiding and trying to find safe places. Those safe places were with peers who "who would stay with you even if you smelled" and with adults in later grades. She also coped by eating, a behavior her parents taught her. When she learned how to read, she escaped by reading all types of books. When reading a book, she thought, "here I can be safe. Here I can just be in a book and it's a different world."

Reflections on childhood experiences. As an adult, Carla saw her childhood as painful, but recognized how it is a part of her personal journey.

> In my heart of hearts, I wish no child ever had to go through anything painful, but the reality is, I did. I also believe that everything happens for a purpose. Everything shapes us into who we are. All the different steps that you experienced in your life bring you to this moment . . . It's just a part of the journey. I don't wish away things that were a part of my life. You know? If I have a way to affect the future for others, I will, so that no one else has to experience that.

Approach to leading. Carla came from a family that did not respect education or hard work.

> If you put multiple crabs in hot water and one tries to crawl out, they'll pull it back in. That's kind of what my family is like. They thought that if you tried to be better than them you were making them less. How dare you think that you could be more than we are!

Yet Carla holds a doctorate degree and was the founding superintendent for a charter school district for 4,500 students.

Carla called herself "an accidental leader" and considered herself a leader "only a few years ago." She attributed this to not owning her own "power" as a leader.

> It's like you put [leadership] up on a pedestal away from where you are and you don't own it a lot of times . . . I think it's more of a woman thing. We don't own it as well and certainly for me it's been something, you know, in my own story where owning the word power has some negativity.

Her approach to leadership was focused on follower development and achieving the vision. She felt the most successful when she has:

> Empowered others and they embody the vision and the dream and they're doing the work . . . When I feel like I'm the best leader is when I can look at my days and my work and my priorities and I say, "Am I building everyone around me in such a way that they have the skills and resources and opportunities they need to achieve the vision?" . . . I think my core value has always been how do you make a difference in this work and how you make a difference in life.

She viewed her childhood experiences as "gifts" that inform her current approach to leading and managing.

> The good thing is that [my childhood experiences] did is it makes me a very sensitive person to other people, so I am very sensitive to someone being treated poorly, whether you want to call it bullying or not. I tend to be the person in the room who is the most sensitive to how we should be treating one another and whether or not we need to change that . . . When you've been hurt you naturally gravitate towards other people who have been hurt. You see it. You recognize it in one another and then you tend to be more open with one another.

She believed this same sensitivity carries through into her approach to leadership.

> The gift is that I bring that same sensitivity to my leadership role, so I've created an organization where our culture is about capturing kids' hearts where we blatantly talk about kids' hearts all the time, where we talk about inclusivity, while we talk about no one being unsafe.

She also believed that her childhood bullying experiences prompted her to change the conditions for the children she serves. She was able to "relive it, redo it for them." While her childhood experiences informed her leadership, she believed that perspective informs choices. "I just think that no matter who we are we have scars, and I think that we choose whether we're going to be defined by the scars. We choose whether they're the gift or they're something that holds us back."

Leadership challenges. One of Carla's most challenging leadership situations occurred while closing a school within her district. With evident regret, she described not being physically present and available for her followers when they needed her.

> Unfortunately, because it was so emotional for me, I suffered in myself a lot from the side in the last six months, because it was emotional. It was hard for me, but what that meant is as a leader is, when the site needed me most, I wasn't there. I sent other people to do work. I made sure work got done. I supported them, but I supported them from a distance and that was the wrong thing to do at that time. If I could do anything different, I would do that differently because I should have been present, I should have been grieving with them . . . I believed the story I was telling myself at the time is that it would be more painful for me to be there with them, as well. Do they really want the person who's shutting their school there?

Leadership successes. Carla pointed to her most successful times as a leader as when she was empowering others. She described specifically feeling successful while conducting a course on effective communication for members of her school district.

> You cannot know the ripples of influence of that impact of having someone really come to terms with how to communicate, how to create safety, how to bring out their own meaning and bring out other people's meaning in safe ways. I think that's one of the ways that I know that I'm leading and leading well.

Adult aggression experiences. Carla has experienced bullying as an adult, calling the experience "harassment." During a series of incidents, a parent of a child in her district tried to tell her what to do and to intimidate her by yelling at her and

slamming his fists on the table. She believed his behavior was partly due to cultural beliefs about what was acceptable behavior, and how he could treat a woman. During these instances, Carla felt afraid and thought the parent might physically hurt her. She remedied this situation by involving her assistant male superintendent and the parent's behavior improved.

Carrie

Childhood and bullying victimization. Carrie grew up in a "loud" household. Her father was an alcoholic, and was frequently verbally abusive to her mother and her younger "rebellious" sister. Her father, though, was not abusive toward Carrie, as she was a "daddy's girl." At 12 years of age, Carrie discovered her father was having a romantic affair with another woman, and he "fell off the pedestal." "From that point on, I became the caregiver of my mother, a typical adult child, or a child of an alcoholic, overly responsible child of an alcoholic," she said.

Prior to middle school, she considered herself not the "smartest girl" in the school. She was "shy and a bookworm." Her bullying experiences began in middle school when she moved from a large city to a small city and suddenly became the "smart girl." During a one-year period, she was consistently bullied by two girls, Jessie and Delilah. Jessie was "scrawny, short, thin, with very straight hair," threw food at Carrie in the lunchroom, and tried to trip Carrie in the hallway. Delilah put paint on the back of Carrie's shirt and liked to turn Carrie's locker lock backwards. Carrie described their behavior as "irritating and annoying."

Carrie was saddened that her best friend Mary did not stand up to Jessie because Mary was also Jessie's friend. "[Mary] didn't stand up to her and she didn't say, 'You

know, quit throwing food at my friend,'" Carrie said. After one specific bullying incident, Carrie decided to not be friends with Mary.

While Carrie was physically taller than Jessie, she believed Jessie could physically hurt her if she stood up to her. Instead of confronting the bullying, Carrie coped by escaping through books.

> I would say that researching, reading, finding out about stuff, was always my way of coping. Knowledge has always been power for me. I wouldn't say that I went and read about bullying, but I would say that what I did was I read to escape.

The bullying eventually stopped when a child in the neighborhood, Dana, intervened.

> One time [Jessie] was tripping me and I was walking with [Dana], and [Dana] turned around to [Jessie], and she said, "Leave us alone," and [Jessie] stopped, because, you know, you've got to stand up to a bully. [Dana] just looked her right in the eyes and just told her to stop. I guess nobody'd actually talked to her that way, and told her to quit it, and she finally quit it. When I finally had somebody defending me, [Jessie] cut it out. From that day forward, I ate lunch with [Dana] and I hung out with [Dana], and [Dana] was my best friend, and we started walking to school together.

Delilah stopped bullying Carrie when Delilah's mother "dragged her to my front doorstep" to apologize to Carrie.

Reflections on childhood experiences. Carrie wished she had never been bullied and believed no one else should have to go through a similar experience.

> Even upon reflection, even thinking to myself, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and even thinking that I may be more capable of standing up to bullies today, and I cannot honestly say that I am glad that I have had that experience.

She believed that it "probably stunts your emotional development." She did not regret the experiences because "everything had to happen the way it did" so that she could be the person she is today. However, she thought she may have some "emotional scars" from these experiences.

Approach to leading. Carrie defined her leadership by her "Myers'-Briggs type, INFP." As an INFP, she has a deep need to be understood and to be accepted, "when I'm misunderstood it really hurts. I'm a nurturer. I'm a caregiver. I'm a developer of people. That's my leadership stance." She also described herself as emotionally intelligent, as she can relate to others.

> I think understanding other people's points of view, I'm able to relate with almost everyone, even a narcissistic bully. . . . I would say with everyone I can always find points of agreement and something relatable. That's what I always try to focus on, our points of relatability with every person that I have to work with, and I stay focused on those points and not on the points of disagreement.

When she described one of her early leadership successes, she characterized her leadership approach as similar to Greenleaf, Spears, Covey, and Senge's (2002) theory of servant leadership.

> I didn't know about servant leadership at the time, but that's what I was doing. I saw my job as making sure that they need to get their jobs done. I basically just told them, "What do you need me to do?" I didn't know their jobs . . . How could I tell them what to do? . . . I just basically made sure I managed their careers. I wanted to make sure they could move up. I wanted to make sure they could be successful, and I wanted to make sure I removed their barriers, whatever barriers they had in place . . . What fueled me as a manager was developing my people. I could not stand the part of management that was about control. So anything about planning and control, budgeting, that stuff, the administrative part of management, just bored me, eluded me, did not play to my skillset at all. The development part, which to me, constituted the leading part of a manager's role, was right in my wheelhouse.

From these experiences, she learned how to be a successful leader and learned the key attributes of being a successful leader.

> It's really actually just being empathetic. You've got to put yourself and think about what you want as an employee. It's really not rocket science . . . It just amazes me how few people get it. I think part of it is because power just corrupts. Once you've got the power, you've got the responsibility, you've got the control, you feel like you have to control it so that you're okay because all of a sudden it's

> on you, and you've got to make sure everybody does it okay, or you got to do it because it's on your head.

Leadership challenges. Carrie shared that she had a nervous breakdown during one of her most unsuccessful professional leadership roles. In this role, she was sexually harassed and believed that she was a "square peg in a round hole" because most of her followers and colleagues had different personality types.

> I felt like a victim, really. I also felt I was weak because I had been suffering from depression, that I think was caused by the sexual harassment in my environment. How do you put up with that stuff? I thought that if I had been a stronger person I would've been able to deal with it. I mean there were other women at [my company] who dealt with it, who dealt with it differently. They were less expressive and quiet and just put up with it.

Leadership successes. Carrie described successful leadership experiences by sharing her personal experiences with discrimination. While working on her doctorate, Carrie became pregnant with her first child. One of her advisers then announced publicly during class that Carrie and he had agreed she would delay completion of her degree due to her pregnancy, despite never having had this discussion with Carrie. She felt discriminated against based on her reproductive status, but she continued her studies. Carrie gave birth to her first and then second child while completing her doctorate and completed her degree on time.

She then described her successful leadership experience when she recently helped one of her advisee doctoral students. The student became pregnant during her studies and the student's committee member did not believe she could complete her degree. Carrie, however, believed she could. Carrie not only helped the student complete her degree, but also helped the student secure a coveted full-time faculty tenure-track position prior to graduating.

> I feel incredibly proud because not only did I help a student, I helped a mother. I helped someone who I think was like me, and I saw her when she was first in my class, I saw her potential . . . I feel proud. I feel like I've won against a powerful adversary. I feel like I scored one for all the pregnant mamas in the world. I feel like I scored one for academic motherhood. I feel like I've made a huge victory against anti-academic motherhood forces. It's not just her. This was a victory for academic mamas.

Reflections on gender. Given that Carrie studied leadership professionally, she was knowledgeable about the differences between male and female approaches to leadership.

> The whole work life thing is intimately involved in women's ways of leading. As long as women are the ones that have the babies, we're tasked with this whole flexibility issue and this whole integration of our non-work lives with our work lives. The full idea of women's way of leading all have to do with the way that you mother your children is the same way you mother your workers or your people.

She also saw limitations with her ability to reach a high-level position in an organization because she was a nurturing and caring female.

> I think I would be a fabulous leader, like a CEO, big time leader, but I'd never get there because it's so difficult to rise through the ranks of the middle. You just get shot. You can't make it. The things you have to do to get to the top are things that a true [feeling and nurturing] female just can't or won't do. You have to be different getting up there than you have to be at the top.

Adult aggression experiences. Carrie was very knowleadgable about adult bullying, and knows she has experienced adult bullying throughout her career. At her current workplace, she was dealing with a bullying coworker who "uses threatening language and behavior" during meetings to intimidate others and creates a "hostile working environment." Carrie vowed she would intervene soon by either leaving during the next meeting if he behaved inappropriately or by telling the coworker his behavior is unacceptable. In the interim, Carrie has coped with this bullying situation by protecting

others. "I am blocking his attempts to hurt others, and that gives me almost a kind of immunity because I'm not protecting myself, per se, I'm protecting others. Then, when he comes after me, the ones who can see that I'm protecting them start protecting me."

Findings

Referring to participant profiles as the evidentiary base and providing additional related supporting evidence, the findings are organized into three major themes supported by subthemes. The first major theme, *context of the experience,* explores conditions surrounding participants' lived experiences. These factors existed or currently exist, participants are aware of these factors, and the factors influence the experience of being a women leader who survived childhood bullying. Subthemes include place, personal characteristics, self-efficacy and expectations, and mentorship and guidance. The second major theme, *enduring the experience*, described the social and familial issues participants could not change. Sub-themes include childhood social norms, leadership norms, and being vulnerable. The third major theme, *changing the experience,* describes both internal and external efforts participants and others used intentionally to modify their lived experiences. Sub-themes include escaping, escapism, and coping; defying familial and social expectations; reaching the limit; future orientation; "gifts of the past;" and orientation towards followers.

Context of the Experience

Across participant descriptions, there appears to be consistency among the contexts of their experiences. These contextual descriptions include shared self-perceptions of intelligence and professional self-efficacy. Other descriptions include the

places where lived experiences occurred and mentorship and guidance from peers, adults, and colleagues.

Self-perceptions. The women in the study seemed to describe similar personal characteristics. These characteristics included a self-perceived and externally validated high level of cognitive intelligence, professional self-confidence, and empathic abilities.

Intelligence. Participants consistently described themselves as having a high level of cognitive intelligence as children, resulting in bullying by teachers. Sarah believed her bullying started in elementary school and "it was more the teachers in elementary school, I've got to be honest, I had a couple of them. The bottom line is, I was really smart, and I was bored beyond all reason and comprehension." Adela excelled academically, so much so that she was able to skip a grade and be placed in advanced classes, but her intelligence resulted in challenges from adults. She described a teacher who "was actually a little bit of a bully" and believed she did not belong in advanced classes. Participants also described that they were bullied by peers because of their intelligence. Carrie described the transition from being perceived as a regular child to being the "smart girl" at school, and Roxy said, "I was part of the real smart kids."

Similar descriptions extended into most of their adult self-perceptions. For instance, Adela believed she was "smarter than the average bear," as she described her leadership approach. Sarah recalled how sometimes "it gets hard to remind myself that it's not that I'm the smartest person in the room but I am one of them."

***Being empathic*.** Participants described themselves as empathic, either within the context of leading or in general. Carrie believed she was empathic, described this

attribute as a fundamental leadership trait, and questioned why more leaders are not empathic. As Roxy said:

> I have a lot of empathy for people. I do put myself in their shoes, and I know how it feels when somebody is being condescending . . . I know how it feels to be unappreciated, or to be overpowered, and all of that. That empathy comes from my experience of being bullied, and having those feelings, and the thought that I would never cause somebody that same feeling is what really keeps me in check. Not to say that I haven't, because I have, but it's really a barometer for me, when I really need to step back. I can see it in their body language, I can see it in their face. I can hear it in their answers, and empathize with it so much that it really . . . It is, it's a gauge. It gets me to stop, and reflect, and step back, and say, "Okay. Maybe I need to do something different."

Adela also recognized her empathic abilities, noting how she "feels everybody's everything" and said that her childhood bullying experiences "provides me empathy when I listen to colleagues, or even my staff about things that may not be 'fair.' I'm very sensitive to that." Adela further described how she felt challenged when she misinterpreted her followers' needs and did not provide the right type of support. Carla similarly said that her childhood experiences made her:

> very sensitive to someone being treated poorly. You might say something to someone else that you think is fine but if I hear something in it that I think is, I'm going to call you on it. I'm going to say, "Do you understand this is how that came across? Do you understand this could have hurt that person's feelings?"

Similar to Adela, Carla described the challenging situation of closing one of her schools when her empathic abilities were inaccurate, and she did not interpret follower needs and provided too little support.

Self-confidence and self-efficacy. While participants self-described high levels of intelligence, their desires and beliefs in their abilities to handle both childhood and professional situations were strained. As children, participants seemed to lack confidence as they dealt with the childhood bullying experiences. Most participants would cry,

never fight back, and “shrink into me” (Adela) by retreating mentally and or physically after bullying instances. Adela described how she would cope with bullying instances by using self-talk, telling herself “the story that they're just jealous and one day, I'm going to be this super fabulous person.”

In the workplace, Sarah described how at times her confidence and self-efficacy was lacking. “It always feels like, you know. . . I'm an impostor. How did I get here? They're just going to find out I'm a lower middle class kid. I'm the first in my family to finish college.” During a challenging leadership situation, she thought co-workers would eventually find out that “one of us is not like the others,” experiencing self-doubt and feeling like she did not belong or deserve her leadership position. Jill similarly recalled feeling like “everybody else around this table is better and smarter than I am" during meetings and said that she suffers from “a horrible case of imposter syndrome.” Jill defined imposter syndrome as a “tendency to, when I'm in different situations, feel like I'm not qualified to be there or I'm going to get found out.” Similarly, Carla said, “I know that one of my stories that I have to work to overcome is that [I am] not good enough and always trying to prove myself.” Loretta also mentioned, “I have a very bad self-esteem issue, like constant. Constant, thinking I was bad, or I need to change, or now that I'm getting older I'm ugly, or just I'm very hard on myself.”

Environmental experiences. In addition to self-perceptions, environments like home, school, the bus, and the workplace seemed to have held contextual significance to participant lived experiences. Home had mixed associations of trauma and stress, or learning and development, for participants. Similarly, the workplace provided mixed associations where some participants were bullied to “do things that are against,

sometimes, your internal makeup" (Loretta), yet experienced professional fulfillment from leading.

Home. As children, Carrie, Roxy, Loretta, Sarah, and Carla experienced home as places of distress, as their families dealt with drug, alcohol, and emotional abuse. As Roxy described, "it was not a stable home, it was a lot of chaos, a lot of drama." Carrie's "loud" childhood home was the place she needed to parent her alcoholic and abusive father. Sarah characterized her childhood home life as the "war at home." As an adult, Sarah intentionally created a home where her children could be "safe" from control and criticism, unlike her childhood experiences.

Jill's experiences with home were slightly different, for her home was a place of refuge. After being bullied as a child, Jill ran home to cry to her parents about what had happened. She also described how "there was not a lot of arguing, or confrontation of any kind in my home . . . If there was an argument, it was considered to be devastating." As an adult, she was thankful that she worked from home so that she did not have to be physically near her bullying supervisor.

School. Similar to home, school was a place that held juxtaposed experiences of trauma and respite. Most participants described school as a place where they were bullied. Yet, school was also a "sanctuary" away from their childhood homes and a place where they excelled. As Adela said, "school has always been a sanctuary because I'm good at it." While Carla was bullied at school, she also found the supportive adult mentoring relationships she "hungered for" at school and received recognition by excelling at sports. Roxy loved being at school so much that she only missed one day of school from kindergarten to sixth grade. "I missed the last day of sixth grade because I

hurt myself, and I still wanted to go to school with a bleeding leg that was cut up and needed 50 stitches," she said.

Analogous to both home and school experiences, the bus was a source of both trauma and respite. Loretta described taking the bus to church to escape her home life. She also described the school bus as a venue where she experienced extreme bullying. Jill described the bus as operated by an adult who could have protected her from bullying and as the vehicle to the place where she was bullied.

***The workplace*.** The workplace held related experiences for participants, being a source of both professional fulfillment and purpose, while also a place that facilitated bullying and aggressions. In the workplace, participants developed as leaders, achieving their visions and goals. Carla became the "accidental leader" of her school district through a professional opportunity in which there were no "glass ceilings." There, she found both passion and purpose by building a school district where she could "capture kids' hearts" with her followers. Adela reflected about her experiences through her work with people living in poverty as she said, "being able to speak for those who don't have that voice is the most rewarding, and when I feel like I'm in my leadership zone." Loretta viewed the workplace as a place where her followers entrusted "their lives" to her and this trust provided a deep level of professional fulfillment. Yet the workplace is where she has had to constantly "fight" for what she wanted.

Mentorship, guidance, coping and resiliency. Within the school and workplace environments, participants described another contextual element of mentorship and guidance. Participants consistently described instances when others helped them cope and be resilient to both challenging childhood and adult experiences. Loretta said, "I had

a lot of great teachers. Actually, I think they saved me." Roxy credited her childhood resiliency partly to mentors at the private school she attended.

> I was confused. I had no parents, I had no real productive parenting, except what I got through school. That's what I mean this school saved me . . . it gave me some type of foundation that really, I drew a lot of support and strength from . . . I really needed to know that there was something good, something positive, you know, that this really wasn't how life was supposed to be (Roxy).

Similarly, as an adult, Roxy attributed her leadership approach to both helpful mentors like her past "hippy-dippy" supervisor Alma and inadequate mentors like her past "charismatic" supervisor. Carla also ascribed her resilience as a child to adults (other than her parents) and peers who helped her throughout her youth. She said she "hungered" for "adults who would connect with me on that level."

Summary. The contexts of participant experiences appeared as a theme within this study. Subthemes included self-perceptions of intelligence, self-esteem and confidence, and being empathic. Descriptions of and shared meanings associated with school, home, and the workplace were also consistent among participant descriptions. Participants also related mentorship and guidance in childhood and as adults to their resiliency and leadership approaches. Together, these contextual elements provided evidence of the conditions surrounding participants' lived experience and support the next two themes of enduring the experience and changing the experience.

Enduring the Experience

While the contexts of the experience appeared within participant descriptions and provided a backdrop for the experiences of leading as a female bullying survivor, there were also recurring descriptions of elements of the experience participants endured. Participants believed they were unable to modify these conditions or in some cases were

not aware they existed. The conditions were (a) being vulnerable, (b) childhood social norms, and (c) leadership norms.

Being vulnerable. Vulnerability mostly as an outcome of circumstances appeared as a recurring issue within participant experiences. As children, most participants experienced a tumultuous home and school life where they endured emotional challenges and were without the protection of family members or friends. This vulnerability again appeared for participants as adults within the workplace, through situations in which they were susceptible to workplace aggressions and incivility. For instance, Jill commented how the bus driver left her vulnerable to her childhood bully's attacks. In retrospect, Jill thought the bus driver should have intervened more directly. This vulnerability was again seen in Jill's workplace experiences and her supervisor's bullying, which she was unable to address due to her tendency to avoid confrontation and because she believed it would not change the situation. As Jill said:

> When I want to stand up to my boss and when he's completely out of line, or does something wrong, and does something to try to make me feel like crap, tells me that I'm horrible. What I should do is be like, "No, you're full of shit," and fight for myself, but I just shut down, because I'm like, "There's no point." It's not going to change his mind.

Carrie similarly was vulnerable to her childhood bullies' attacks because she did not know how to address the bullying. She believed other children should have intervened and protected her. As an adult, though, Carrie believed she has learned how to confront bullies and vowed to confront her current workplace bully.

Carla's impoverished childhood, lack of familial support and medical issues left her vulnerable to bully attacks. While leading, she felt vulnerable to the aggressive parent's bullying. In contrast, Carla described a level of vulnerability and related feelings

while leading successfully. She said, “I feel vulnerable. I feel energized. I feel, I feel warm. I feel caring . . . I feel connected.”

Childhood social norms. In addition to vulnerability, childhood social norms and the participants’ lack of conformity appeared to be a consistent theme in participants’ lived experiences. Participants were bullied due to their physical characteristics, level of intelligence, and hygiene. As Sarah recalled the messages she received as a child were “‘You're not okay. This isn't okay. You're not this. You shouldn't be.’ This desire for everyone to be the same, and to act the same, and to be the same.” As Carla reflected upon her childhood experiences, she mentioned, “I wish there was a way to give children, and me as a child, that ability to be okay when things happen to you, and to understand it's not about you, really. It's about the [other] person.” Loretta echoed that she wished as a child she knew “that it doesn't matter what people think, or how they feel, or how they judge you.”

Leadership norms. Participants also experienced messages that seemed to center on workplace and leadership norms that were different than their personal characteristics or approaches to their work. Adela recalled how she cut her hair to conform with typical workplace female beauty standards and achieve her professional and leadership goals.

> I had these beautiful braids and [people] said, "You'll never get the job with that hair." I remember cutting off my locks and just being in hysterics because I cut my hair. That's sad for me. Yeah, I remember that feeling of, "All right. I know that nobody's going to lead the way I do. I have to do this. I have to cut my hair.”

Roxy added to the descriptions of female leadership norms by stating:

> The women [leaders] that are really praised are very submissive, very gentle, very nurturing, and it's because the men that are so honored are so alpha. If you're not that submissive, and you're not that gentle, then you're aggressive, or your ego's there if you're a woman, or you're not professional.

Loretta hinted at how men lead within professional settings, as she compared herself to her male counterparts because she did not "feed anybody's ego." Loretta's "straightforward" leadership approach has been described by others as "assertive and aggressive, never a bitch but definitely assertive, close to bitch," she said. Similarly, Jill described how women are expected to act aggressively within a corporate setting to be successful leaders. With this view, Jill described how she "bit her tongue" because she did not want to have an aggressive response. She also described a female leader whom she admired who could be caring and gentle, yet lead effectively, as if these characteristics typically contrast.

Sarah described that one of her most challenging leadership situations during a prior professional role was when she had to supervise a team of men who viewed her as "weak." Conversely, after trying to be assertive as a leader and realizing this approach was not welcomed within her current female-dominated workplace, Sarah began to resign to a more passive approach. As Sarah described:

> My reaction's always the same. Pull it in, pull it back, tell them what they want to hear . . . The quieter I get, the more I make them feel comfortable about being assholes, [and they say], "Oh, you just seem so much more relaxed!"

Roxy described how she initially viewed leadership as "black and white" and "aggressive" when working with male leaders. She then described how she changed her approach to one that is more focused on followers when she started working with a female leader who was not focused on power or "ego." Carrie recognized that leadership norms for female and male leaders were limiting and would have prevented her from becoming a "fabulous leader, like a CEO."

Summary. The ways in which participants endured the experience appeared consistently within participant descriptions. Participants were aware of these issues and discussed that they might have wanted to change them, but were unable to. Participants were vulnerable due to familial issues as children and vulnerable again within the workplace. Participants experienced bullying based on social norms for appearance, intelligence, and hygiene. Again as adults, participants experienced social norms within the workplace about appearance and behaviors.

Changing the Experience

While participants described the context of their experiences and how they endured the experience, the majority of their descriptions were related to the third major theme, changing the experience. This theme describes characteristics of their experiences that provided the impetus, tools, mindsets and or abilities to alter their experiences either as children or adults. Participants described efforts to cope through (a) escapism and escaping, (b) defying social and familial norms, (c) future orientations, and (d) orientations towards followers.

Escaping, escapism, and coping. Participants described efforts to avoid situations through deliberate means or ongoing efforts to pursue distractions. The escapism and efforts to escape provided tools to cope with circumstances and were sources of enjoyment. As children, escapism was primarily experienced through the arts, reading, and learning. Roxy and Sarah listened and created music to avoid the realities of their childhood bullying experiences and chaotic homes. Carla spent "a lot of time hiding and escaping" and read so she could be in "a different world." Carrie frequently read as a form of enjoyment and to escape from her childhood difficulties. As an adult, she said

she does not have the time to read outside of work, but her "coping mechanism now is more reading for research and just being knowledgeable" about her workplace bully's behavior. As Carrie said:

> Now I'm much more informed academically, in terms of understanding . . . Knowing what incivility is, knowing what bullying is, knowing what a narcissist is, knowing ways of leading, plus drawing on my own personal knowledge of being bullied, my own emotional intelligence, and my own experiences in the workplace from the private sector. So, that's how I cope with my own current bully.

Some participants also described eating as a coping mechanism and subsequently gaining weight. Carla mentioned that her parents taught her how to cope using food as a child. Jill, Sarah, and Adela all gained weight during challenging leadership experiences "because food's an acceptable narcotic" (Adela).

Defying social and familial norms. Participants consistently described desires to achieve more than what family members expected or allowed. Carla likened her family to a "crab pot," trying to pull her back despite her desires to attain higher education and career success. As she said, "my parents believed that I was going to be the best waitress at Denny's that there ever was, and that that would be a wonderful life for me." Carla "worked really hard to achieve at school, to overcome" these unwanted familial expectations. Similarly, Adela expected to be "super fabulous" when she was older through education and career success, defying her bullies and those who attempted to oppress her as a child. While Sarah's family had unattainable standards for her as a child and were over-controlling and tried to "hold her back," Sarah graduated from high school and "never looked back." Instead, Sarah only thought about going to college and her future career. Loretta was keenly aware of the lifestyle she wanted from a young age and

took steps to achieve it by not living with her mother. Roxy decided in middle school that she wanted to attend a private school because education "was the way out" of her circumstances. Her mother told her that she was unable to pay for it and said:

> "If you don't want to go to public school, then you have to figure out a way to pay for it." I think she said it thinking that I wasn't going to do it, and I ended up getting a scholarship to one of the top 15 private girl's schools in the state.

Reaching the limit. Participants described reaching turning points when they wanted to change their experiences as children and adults. Tired of their childhood bullies' actions, Loretta and Roxy eventually learned how to confront them. Loretta's approach was more physical, attempting but regretting being a bully and then later becoming "a badass." Roxy's approach was more verbal and cognitive, asking those who bullied "why are you doing this to me?" Carrie reached her limit as a child, but she was not aware of how to stop the bullying beyond expecting others to intervene.

Roxy and Loretta seemed to have carried this approach to the same extent into their workplace leadership positions. However, Loretta's lack of a "poker face" and "assertive" approach when facing workplace challenges was in sharp contrast to Roxy's delayed verbal confrontation. Loretta also seemed to be weary of constantly fighting back and was thinking about what it would be like if she did not fight back, whereas Roxy seemed more focused and undeterred. Carrie described her awareness as an adult and leader of how to defuse her workplace bullying and has planned action.

Sarah did not confront her childhood bullies. However, Sarah described that as an adult she confronted her subordinate who tried to make her appear incompetent with a delayed but direct approach. This was the "hardest thing" she ever did, as her behavior seemed to be restrained during workplace challenges. At the same time, she believed she

was reaching her limit with trying to fulfill external professional expectations and not being herself. "I feel like maybe in my mid-50s I might just be ready to say I'm done with this. I want to be . . . I just want to let that façade go and be who I really am," Sarah said.

Future orientation. While participants had reached their limit with external expectations and some have fought back, most participants seem to be "future-oriented" (Sarah). Most participants either do not spend time thinking about what had happened or they focus on how to change the future for others. Loretta added that while she thought she had not processed her childhood experiences, "it doesn't make sense to continue to bring up stuff that's already passed" because "there's a place that I've been able to survive and keep things." As Carla described, "I don't spend a lot of time in the past. I kind of move forward and so I will tell you that I'm not a big one for living and reliving and telling you every gory detail." Sarah further described this orientation as a coping and resiliency tool.

> I don't pay much attention to the past. I'm a future-oriented person, so it's about what I'm going to do, where I'm going to be. So, for me, it's all about future, but this [study] has caused me to reflect on a few things. And I would say, one of the things that someone said to me once . . . "You know, the thing that I'm always the most impressed with, is your resiliency. You pick yourself up, you find a way, and you move on." And I do think a lot of that has to do with my future orientation. And I think that was a coping mechanism. But I do see resiliency as that quality, which I never thought of it as a skill, but it really is. Helps in leadership, because I'm able to deal with the setbacks. I may be totally despondent when at the bottom, and then I have a plan. "Okay, what can I do? How can we move this forward, how can I get to the next thing?" So, I think that resiliency is a really vital quality, because when people get setbacks, and they get stuck there, then nothing can change.

"Gifts of the past." Most participants viewed their childhood bullying experiences as "gifts of the past" (Carla) or useful at some level. As Loretta noted being

“forced to learn something and you're put in an environment where you have to grow up, definitely creates you differently than not having those opportunities.” Similarly, Adela believes her difficult experiences as a child have directly informed her approach to leadership, building “that muscle of resilience.” While during her childhood she did not like being bullied, Roxy recognized how these experiences comprised her personal history and they are “a good thing” because they contributed to her unique qualities.

Carla recalled how her childhood experiences have made her a more “sensitive adult” who is more open to others who have experienced similar difficulties. She believed this same sensitivity carries through into her approach to leadership where she was able to “capture kids’ hearts” through inclusivity and creating safe spaces. She also credited her childhood bullying experiences as prompts to change the conditions for the children she served. She was able to “relive it, redo it for them” using her “scars” to inform her choices.

In contrast, Jill and Carrie, whose childhood bullying did not last as long as the other participants’, did not view their childhood bullying experiences as useful. Carrie thought she may have “emotional scars,” and Jill did not believe there were any benefits. As Jill said:

> For me, it's not something that I can look at it and say, "It made me a stronger person," or "It made me realize I shouldn't treat people a certain way." There's none of that life lesson in there. It was just a horrible kid who was really shitty to me.

Prosocial and altruistic orientation toward followers. All participants described a prosocial leadership approach oriented toward followers where they sought to benefit their followers and others. In addition to describing herself as a servant leader

toward her followers, Adela said, “I am a recovering approval-oholic. Where it's the let me help you, let me give this that and the other. I like people to be happy.” Similarly, Carrie mentioned she is also a “servant leader” focused on follower development. Sarah described wanting to help followers so much that occasionally it is to her “detriment.” Jill said, “I try to recognize folks, make them feel valued, show them that their opinion matters. Again, look for consensus, try to get involvement, rather than me just dictating what has to be done.” Carla mentioned that she chose her profession because she wanted to help children. Carla described being able to re-do the past through her follower-oriented approach to leadership as she said, “I think that being bullied as a child is one of the reasons I chose the field I chose. I chose to be in a place where I was affecting children. I chose to create safety for children.”

Summary. Out of the three major themes in this study, changing the experience, appeared to be the most robust and comprised most of the participant descriptions. This theme described those participant conditions of which they were aware and that provided the impetus for change. They included escapism, escaping, and coping measures. These efforts provided a method for participants to remove themselves from their realities. Other change efforts included defying social and familial expectations that demonstrated how participants changed their life trajectories and reached their limits of bullying and external expectations. Participants also enacted change through their future orientations, understanding their past experiences, and having an orientation toward followers. Through these change efforts, participants considered how to enact their leadership visions.

Results and Interpretations

This study's findings were made evident not only by the contexts for participant lived experiences, but also how participants endured and sought to change their experiences. Collectively, these factors informed four results and interpretations: (a) The first result discusses the experience of socially constructed norms both as children and adults; (b) the second result discusses the similarity between the psychological and psychosocial outcomes experienced both as children and adults; (c) the third result discusses how participant leadership is influenced by childhood experiences; and (d) the fourth result describes how participants enact change through prosocial empathic approaches.

Result One. Women leaders who were bullied as children re-experienced challenges with socially constructed norms while leading.

Bullying by its very nature is indicative of social values and norms and attempts to reinforce the "normal us" (Thornberg, 2015). As evidenced through the reasons for bullying, the group values were to not be too smart (Roxy, Carrie) or overweight (Roxy, Sarah), reflecting cultural values for girls. Participants were also expected to not be poor (Roxy, Carla) or not to be ethnically different (Adela, Sarah), reflecting values of at least the appearance of economic means (Klein, 2012) and of the dominant ethnicity. When participants deviated from social norms, their male or female bullies attempted to have them conform by asserting dominance and gaining power over participants through aggressive physical or relational behaviors. This assertion of dominance through aggression, a male cultural norm (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2015), demonstrated to

participants as children the consequences of detouring from socially constructed expectations.

It is relevant to mention that some participants' experiences may have also been layered with additional experiences of longstanding known issues of marginalization. All participants were women in leadership roles; some participants were poor as children and one was African-American. Gender and racial discrimination and the resulting marginalization are highly embedded into the systems, processes, structure, and even environments (Reskin, 2012) that define everyday life and reinforce unobtainable and undesirable social norms. Moreover, individuals living in poverty experience further marginalization as they do not have access to the same resources and experiences that others have, placing them at a potential disadvantage throughout their life (Mood & Jonsson, 2015). This study did not focus on the experiences of poverty or ethnic discrimination directly, but these issues are reflective of some of the underlying social norms found within participant descriptions and may have compounded the experiences of socially constructed norms.

Most participants described that they had no initial desires to explicitly and outwardly oppose these expectations and their bullies' aggression. While one participant described an internal resistance to these social norms through positive self-talk (Adela), the others did not describe any resistance. Instead, they escaped and used escapism to avoid the emotional and physical experiences of being bullied and the social expectation ascribed to them. As they coped with these expectations, some participants felt a loss of belonging and struggled with their identities (Thornberg, 2015).

Two participants (Loretta, Roxy) eventually demonstrated efforts to challenge the norms, as children, by confronting their bullies. Roxy's verbal humanizing confrontation did not seem to be powerful enough to resolve the bullying. Loretta, however, said she learned how to physically and verbally "stick up" for herself by watching and reproducing similar displays of aggression as her bullies. In doing so, Loretta regained her dominance and power from peers who had bullied her. Given bullying is indicative of the prevailing culture and social values (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2015), there may likely be other factors that helped Loretta resolve bullying that she did not describe. However, Loretta's experience seems to indicate that when a victim attempts the feat of confronting bullies unassisted by adults or others, she may need to match or exceed the bullying aggression to assert their dominance, overcome the struggle with cultural norms, and resolve bullying. This seems like it would be an insurmountable feat given bully victims exhibit passive behaviors in response to bullying (Hampel et al., 2009) and possibly suggests that Loretta's experience was an exception to the norm.

Participants experienced challenges with socially constructed norms as adults, similar to their experiences as children. Again, it is relevant to mention that broader and persistent social marginalization based on ethnicity and gender may have contributed to participants' challenges with norms. Women and women of color experience societal expectations of being "subordinate, incapable, or lacking control over their actions" (Liebow, 2016, p. 715) and may consciously or unconsciously adopt these expectations. More specifically, participants in this study experienced expectations for how they *should* act in relation to their male counterparts, as female leaders, and within the workplace in general. "Leadership as leadership seduces only those who are of the same kind—

masculine or masculine identified—and promotes, as ‘leadership knowledge' only a homosocial system of organization, i.e., based on the values of masculinity, including masculine definitions of femininity” (Calás & Smircich, 1991, p. 571). Participants confirmed these socially constructed male and female norms (Brescoll, 2016) through their descriptions of egocentric, power-centric, and aggressive male leaders (Roxy, Loretta, Jill, Carrie); descriptions of the qualities they admire in female leaders who are kind, gentle, and caring (Roxy and Jill); and through their leadership approaches that sought consensus (Adela) and harmony (Jill). When participants in this study deviated from the “homosocial” system of expected norms (Loretta, Carla, Sarah), they were confronted by supervisors (Loretta), colleagues (Sarah), followers (Carla), and subordinates (Sarah) who reinforced these norms. Interestingly, it seems that only three participants were aware of and described typical female and male leadership norms (Carrie, Carla, Adela). Only one described the challenges that leadership norms may create within the workplace (Carrie).

Carla’s description of the aggressive parent in her school personifies socially constructed male normative aggressive behaviors manifested through bullying (Klein, 2012) and ensuing power struggles between bully and a perceived victim. Carla believed the parent struggled with her role as a female and what he believed was acceptable behavior. He then attempted to gain power over her by physically slamming his fists on the table and verbally by raising his voice. When Carla did not respond in the same manner, he may have viewed his behavior as acceptable and continued to exhibit this physically aggressive behavior in subsequent encounters (Escartín et al., 2011). When she involved her male assistant superintendent in subsequent encounters with the parent,

the parent changed his behavior while in the presence of another male in a position of leadership and power.

As a result of confronting socially constructed leadership norms, participants had varying degrees of resistance and conformity. One participant decided to embrace a more normative female leadership approach after trial and error (Roxy). Aware of her desired approach and what was socially acceptable within her female-oriented workplace, another struggled to adopt a more female approach because it clashed with her authentic leadership approach (Sarah). Similar to her childhood experiences, another participant consciously and continually clashed with these norms through her descriptions of "fighting" (Loretta). Aligned with her highly self-aware nature as a child, one participant (Adela) seemed to be aware of these norms and consciously chose when to take a more normative female or male leadership approach. Three participants seemed to naturally gravitate toward and use more female leadership norms (Jill, Carla, Carrie).

While varying degrees of resistance and conformity were expressed, it also seemed that most participants were challenged at some point during their leadership experiences when they intentionally or unintentionally adopted a masculine approach to leadership. Analogous to the socially constructed "normal us" (Thornberg, 2015) enforced through childhood bullying experiences, participants' leadership experiences became conduits for "gender policing" (Klein, 2012) or reinforcing socially constructed acceptable behaviors for women within their workplaces. In this way, for some participants, the experience of leading reinforced what were and were not socially acceptable female and female leadership normative behaviors. Participants seemed to struggle at times with being both a successful leader and being a women simultaneously,

as if these two characteristics were incompatible. Moreover, their experiences seem to demonstrate how the experience with leadership norms may result in short-term and long-term influences on their approaches to leadership and their roles within workplaces.

Result Two: Being bullied as a child and leading as an adult included similar psychological and psychosocial experiences.

Participants described similar, sometimes parallel, psychological and psychosocial experiences as children and as adults. These experiences included trauma and mental health issues, low self-esteem and resilience.

Trauma and mental health. While most individuals in general experience trauma during their lifetime, participants in this study described multiple traumas both at school and at home. Traumas like bullying, family neglect, drug abuse, spousal abuse, and living in poverty may have collectively contributed to and influenced their psychological and psychosocial experiences (Idsoe, Dyregov, & Idsoe,, 2012; Mishna, 2012). Participants described outcomes like passive avoidance through escaping and escapism used in response to these traumatic experiences as children (Jill, Carrie, Carla, Adela, Sarah), social isolation (Sarah, Carla), and decreased self-esteem (Sarah). These experiences mirrored those described in prior studies on both female and male childhood bullying victims (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Evans, Smokowski et al., 2014; Fox & Boulton, 2006; Perry et al., 1988; Takizawa et al., 2014).

Similarly, participants reiterated these experiences during their adult leadership experiences. Participants exhibited passive avoidance (Sarah, Jill) and tolerated workplace bullying and aggressions at least initially (Carrie, Sarah, Loretta, Adela). Several workplace aggressions led to moderate (Sarah, Adela) or severe mental health

issues (Carrie), similar again to the outcomes described in childhood bullying and workplace bullying literature (Gullander et al., 2014; Harvey & Keashly, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. Most participants (Jill, Roxy, Carla, Sarah, Loretta) described instances of low self-esteem and self-confidence when they questioned their abilities as leaders and workers within the workplace. This struggle with self-esteem is certainly not confined just to women leaders who were bullied as children, as women leaders in general underrate their abilities (Sturm, Taylor, Atwater, & Braddy, 2014) and women around the world have consistently reported issues with self-esteem (Bleidorn et al., 2016). Rather, the intention of mentioning descriptions of low self-esteem and self-confidence is to reiterate descriptions found in studies on childhood bullying outcomes. These studies document self-efficacy as a predictor of childhood bullying and low self-esteem and self-confidence as bullying outcomes in adulthood (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012; Malecki et al., 2015).

Consistent with these studies, this present study found recurring issues with self-esteem and self-efficacy with bullying survivors who were in leadership positions. These issues may be indicative of the effects of childhood bullying or other issues within their lives. Regardless, a common effect of low self-efficacy is low self-confidence (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). Thus, some participants may have been engaged in a self-reinforcing cycle contributing to their feelings of low self-efficacy or imposter feelings. Participants may have also been more susceptible to aggressive behaviors while in the workplace and leading due to their low levels of self-esteem (Harvey & Keashly, 2003) or been less

effective as leaders, as self-efficacy and self-esteem are associated with higher levels of leader efficacy (Judge et al., 2002).

Resilience. Despite experiencing ongoing trauma, participants described resilience as children and as adults. This result contrasts and is aligned with prior research that notes how individuals who are resilient have self-efficacy, can control their thoughts and behaviors, have relationships with caring individuals, and learn from the experience (Hauser, 1999; Hauser, Allen, & Golden,, 2006). Participants described issues with self-efficacy (Jill, Sarah, Carla, Loretta), but described the ability or an effort to control their thoughts and behaviors (Adela, Loretta, Sarah). Participants also had caring, mentoring relationships with adults and peers as children that seemed to facilitate their resilience and coping skills, allowing them to mitigate the impact of bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2005; Masten et al., 1990). Moreover, these relationships set within school settings may have mitigated the negative influences of the parental neglect and family dysfunctions for those who experienced them by providing positive models within a stable and consistent setting (Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Hojer & Johansson, 2013; Hong, Espelage, Grogan-Kaylor, & Allen-Meares, 2012). For some participants, positive relationships with colleagues may have helped them be resilient during workplace aggressions (Carla, Sarah).

Resilience may have further been supported by participants' academic desires to learn and by excelling at school as children (Adela, Roxy, Carrie, Carla) or perhaps by participants' abilities to learn from past stressful situations (Hauser, 1999; Hauser et al., 2006) and see the "gifts of the past." Participants may also have been resilient due to high levels of intelligence (Roxy, Sarah, Adela) (Masten et al., 1990). Their future

orientation or consistent consideration about how their futures could be different than their current realities as children (Sarah, Roxy, Carla, Adela) may have also supported their resilience (Herrenkohl, Tajima, Whitney, & Huang, 2005; Lin et al., 2014). This future orientation is again apparent in adult participant descriptions and may have supported participant resiliency.

Result Three: Women leaders' approach to leadership is informed by bullying experiences.

Participants (Carla, Loretta, Roxy, Adela) in this study consistently described how they believed their "gifts of the past" or childhood traumatic experiences informed their leadership. While it has been shown that positive peer relations with authority figures and learning from other leaders contributes to the development of leadership identity (Yeager & Callahan, 2016), it seems that participants' negative relationships with peers and adults as children also contributed to the development of their leadership identities and approaches. In other words, some participants learned, through their bullying experiences and other childhood experiences, how they did *not* want to lead and approach leadership.

This result also adds to and corroborates existing literature on how bullying and acts of incivility might prompt change in general. Participants' potential to enact change was informed by their childhood and adult bullying experiences. They then harnessed this potential and directed it towards their approach to leadership in general (Loretta, Carla, Roxy, Adela) and informed leadership situations that specifically sought to help marginalized individuals or those with less power. This has been termed in a prior study as "transformative actualization" (Mathiassen, 2013) when applied to situations in

general, but this result proposes to extend this definition specifically to leadership situations and leading. Adela exemplified both how bullying provided her with the potential to actualize change and the way she actualizes this change as she said, “the work I do now is directly informed by what happened then.”

This result also corroborates and adds to existing literature on post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) by demonstrating how posttraumatic growth may manifest while leading and while developing as leaders. Participants used their posttraumatic growth to relate better to others in general and those who were marginalized while leading (Carrie, Roxy, Carla, Adela). For instance, Carrie demonstrated this when she described helping her graduate student, and obtaining a “victory for academic mamas,” who was in similar situation as she was during her doctoral studies. This posttraumatic growth was also demonstrated through general contributions to their personal abilities (Loretta, Adela) and recognition of new educational and career possibilities in life (Adela, Loretta, Roxy, Carla). Loretta recognized her post-traumatic growth and abilities when she said, “you're forced to learn something and you're put in an environment where you have to grow up, definitely creates you differently than not having those opportunities.”

This result suggests that women leaders who experience posttraumatic growth may be different in some regard compared to women leaders in general. Participants may have been equipped with empathic skills or at least the foundation for empathic skills that other leaders do not have or learn elsewise. It may also suggest that positive relationships may have supported participants’ posttraumatic growth (Prati, & Pietrantoni, 2009) and illustrates the necessity for these types of relationships.

Result Four: Women leaders who were bullied enact leadership through altruistic, empathic, and prosocial approaches.

For women leaders who were bullied, leadership was considered a prosocial, altruistic, and empathic experience where they were focused on their followers and follower development. While this approach might be indicative of a typical female approach to leadership, participants (Roxy, Adela, Carla) directly related their empathic abilities to their childhood bullying experiences. They believed their empathy was derived initially and directly from traumatic experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) as children and directly informed their leadership approaches.

They also believed that childhood bullying allowed them to understand from personal experience and feel deeply (McCleskey, 2014; Walter, Humphrey, & Cole, 2012) for others who have been oppressed, marginalized, or traumatized. It seems likely, too, that participants' other marginalizing experiences may have also contributed to their increased personal understanding of others. Participants described issues of childhood poverty and racism, which have long been known as highly social marginalizing experiences (Winchester, 1990). While this is discussed, it needs to be noted that these issues were not explored in depth with participants.

Participants' "transformative actualizations" (Mathiassen, 2013) were enacted both through follower development and prosocial outcomes like benefitting their followers or the greater good (Lorenzi, 2004). Outcomes included helping staff (Loretta, Carrie, Sarah), students (Carrie), children (Carla), and disenfranchised members of the public (Adela, Roxy). Through these outcomes, participants intended to have transformative effects upon followers that would help them develop (Loretta, Carrie,

Carla), and help some participants represent individuals who are disenfranchised within the community at large (Adela, Roxy). Some participants (Loretta, Carla) directly associated the fulfillment they experienced when helping followers with the "power" they have as leaders, while all others described general altruistic approaches that sought to help others (Carrie, Sarah, Jill, Roxy). Some participants also directly associated unsuccessful leadership when their empathic senses were inaccurate or overwhelmed (Carla, Roxy, Adela). Carla embodied this result as she described an empathic approach to leadership where she could re-do past experiences through her leadership and gravitated toward those who were like her and have been hurt. She also attributed one of her greatest leadership failures to being emotionally overwhelmed by the closure of one of her schools.

It is important to note that a transformational approach is not unique to women who have been bullied, as women leaders in general are more likely to use transformational leadership styles that are supportive of followers, provide individual consideration (Stempel, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2015), and exhibit care for their followers (Gabriel, 2015). What seems to be unique to these participants is how the women associated learnings from childhood experiences to their approach. In this way, their motivations and justifications for an altruistic, prosocial, and empathic approach may be different than those of other women leaders in general.

This result may also suggest that the empathic element of adult bullying survivors' emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 1990; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001) is influenced by their childhood experiences. This result confirms quantitative self-reported research on childhood bullying noting that victimization is

associated with affective empathy or the ability to feel what another feels (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012). However, this result may contrast with a prior study that also documented that bullying victims lack cognitive empathic ability or the ability to understand and recognize emotions (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2012), as participants in this study described both affective and cognitive empathic experiences.

Figure 3 depicts both results three and four by presenting the participants' relationships between past experiences, leadership, and approaches to leadership.

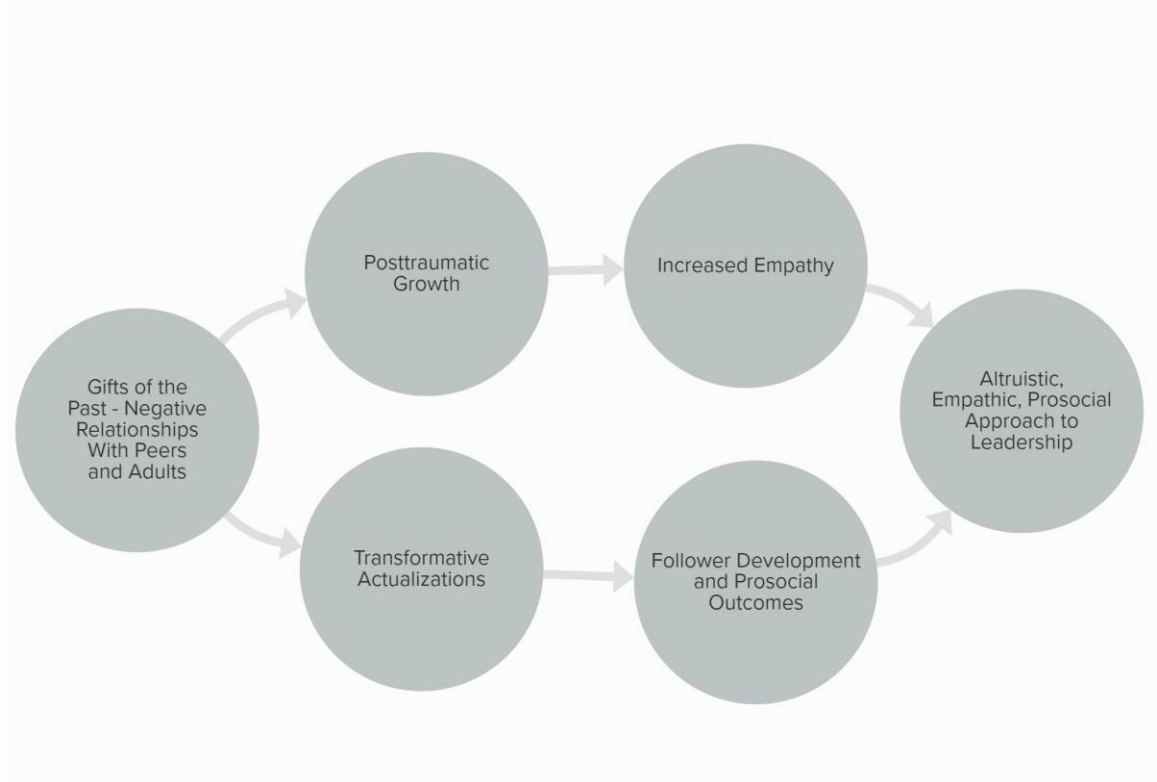

Figure 3. Past experiences and approach to leading.

Summary

The findings from this study were categorized into three areas: context of the experience, enduring the experience, and changing the experience. Context of the experience provided a backdrop related to participants' experiences like intelligence and environment. Enduring the experience described conditions of which participants were aware but could not change, such as social norms and being vulnerable. Changing the experience described the resources, approaches, and beliefs participants used to change their experiences. These included factors like defying familial and social expectations, as well as orientation toward followers.

These findings collectively provided four results. First, participants re-experienced challenges with socially constructed and socially imposed values about how they should act and be in relation to their peers and colleagues. Second, some of the participants' psychosocial and psychological experiences seem to be recurrent, both as children and while leading in the workplace. Third, most participants' leadership approaches are informed by their experiences of bullying. Fourth, participants lead with a prosocial, empathic, and altruistic approach. These four results collectively describe themes arising from this study and the experience of being a woman, a leader, and a survivor of childhood bullying.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of seven women leaders who were bullied as children. Through participant descriptions as children and as adult leaders, this study found themes relating to the context of the experience, enduring the experience, and changing the experience. Moreover, this study found that participants had similar experiences with socially constructed norms, values, and expectations as children and adults, had similar psychological and psychosocial experiences as children and adults, used their bullying experiences to inform their approach to leadership and used prosocial, altruistic, and empathic approaches to leadership.

Using findings and results from this study, this chapter answers the three research questions that guided this study and provides the researcher's conclusions to these questions. Recommendations of actionable solutions to the challenges presented in the results are provided. This chapter also suggests further research that would expand upon this study's findings, as well broaden bullying and leadership research.

Conclusions

Using the findings and results presented in Chapter 4, the study's guiding research questions are answered below.

Research Question One: What are the lived experiences of women leaders who experienced childhood bullying victimization?

The lived experiences for women leaders who were bullied as children were fraught with interpersonal physical, relational, and emotional aggressions that made their

childhood environments stressful and uncomfortable places when victimization and trauma occurred. Victimization was a result of being different intellectually, emotionally, physically, and ethnically, and, by its nature, the bullying they endured was indicative of a broader cultural value of aggression. Experiences with aggressions resulted in psychological and psychosocial implications like social isolation, rumination, and decreased self-esteem. These experiences also occurred amid the broader marginalizing experience of poverty for some women.

Simultaneously, for some, school bullying and victimization were tolerable conduits for coping with and escaping from family dysfunctions. Alcoholism, drug abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect were, in a way, far greater bullies than enduring name calling or being tripped in the hallway. Moreover, the school environment coupled with the positive peer and adult relationships were considered saviors at the sanctuary of school, providing a refuge for the traumas of home and bully victimization. These positive relationships also supported resiliency, as these relationships provided and demonstrated the help and support these women leaders would later in life express as leaders.

Similarly for some, family dysfunctions and, for most women leaders, childhood bullying also served as formative yet painful learning. What they learned through those experiences informed and provided a foundation for the development of leadership approaches. By witnessing aggressive or controlling behaviors from family members, teachers, and peers, some women leaders who were bullied wanted to demonstrate and embody the antithetical behaviors for their followers. They learned from first-hand

experience how much it hurt to be a victim of aggression and did not want to replicate this hurt for followers.

Interestingly, most women leaders who survived childhood bullying understood and accepted what they learned from their bullying experiences. While they believed no one should endure all or parts of painful bullying and the other abusive experiences they had endured, they could not imagine how they would be who they are otherwise. Most women leaders who were bullied as children would not change their past experiences because they embraced the learnings from these experiences.

Yet, through their experiences as leaders and desires to be successful leaders, they revealed additional challenges about socially constructed norms within the workplace set amid the broader marginalizing experiences of being a woman or being ethnically different. Not only did women leaders experience the boundaries of these norms and struggle with navigating these norms, but also these norms contributed to workplace incivility and interpersonal aggressions. Again, women leaders experienced the psychological and social implications of workplace bullying as related to being different in the male-oriented leadership culture within their workplaces, some of these differences being similar to those used as justifications by their childhood bullies. When they did not conform to established parameters of either female or male socially constructed norms, they experienced challenges. For some, conforming to these norms created clashes between their leadership authenticity and what was accepted in their leadership environments. For others, they embraced the norms by changing their leadership approaches to encompass them or by viewing them as the ideal.

Research Question Two: How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied in childhood describe their approach to leadership?

Women leaders who were bullied as children had an empathic, altruistic, follower-focused, and follower development approach to leadership. These women leaders approached leadership with attention toward follower development, devoting a high level of care and attention toward their followers. Admittedly, these approaches are not unique to women leaders who have been bullied. What is unique to women leaders who have been bullied is that their motivations for this approach initiated from, or were informed by, their experiences as children.

Their empathic abilities were derived from firsthand personal and unique understandings of being marginalized and desires to not repeat experiences of marginalization for their followers. Some are able to feel what their followers feel because they have felt it before. Thus, they deeply understand how situations may affect followers. For those who believed it, this empathy was a useful influence and skill that emerged from their childhood experiences.

Through this prosocial and altruistic approach, they experienced dual-fold benefits. They found professional and personal satisfaction by witnessing how their support manifested within followers, and they found satisfaction by witnessing how their followers use their support to realize their own growth. Women leaders who were bullied as children also wanted their leadership to hold greater significance than simply the bottom line. They wanted to have a transformative effect, whether with followers or with the greater community. The measurement of success was how much they helped.

Their approaches were sometimes undergirded by depression, withdrawal, avoidance, and feelings of self-doubt. While these beliefs and experiences may be common among leaders in general, they undoubtedly mirror those they experienced as a child. In this way, they re-experienced some of their childhood experiences through leading.

Research Question Three: How do mid-career women leaders who were bullied describe their challenges and successes while leading?

Successes were instances that provided professional fulfillment, and when women leaders who were bullied were able to use their talents in an authentic way to benefit their followers. Their talents include being able to solve problems, gaining buy-in, building consensus, coaching others, and teaching job skills. They used these talents to help their followers and disenfranchised members of the community, assistance which was enacted through a strong conscience and empathic approach informed by their childhood experiences.

Women leaders who were bullied felt challenged when their empathy and abilities to read their followers were not inaccurate or were overwhelmed. As they feel deeply for their followers, they felt just as deeply when they inadequately interpreted follower needs. This was especially noticeable and difficult when they provided too little support or the wrong type of support.

They were also challenged when they encountered and clashed with socially constructed norms about how they should be as leaders. Women leaders who were bullied as children were aggressive at times, direct, focused and not passive, clashing with social beliefs about how women leaders should act. Some wanted to display these

male leadership norms, but begrudgingly tried to shun what seemed to be a part of their authentic leadership approach. They also described being warm, caring, kind, and considerate, aligning their approach with female leadership norms, norms some admired, some assumed after trial and error, and some begrudgingly adopted at times as well. In this way, navigating these leadership norms became like an adult "bully" that attempted to have these women conform to such norms by establishing power and dominance over them.

Positionality Revisited

As a woman leader who was bullied as a child and the researcher for this study, I believe this study was as much an emotional journey as it was an intellectual journey. Emotionally, it was sometimes difficult to visit participants' childhood experiences that were so similar to my experiences. I frequently felt like I was grieving for and with participants as they described incidents they endured. However, I also felt honored to revel and share in the joy of their leadership visions and successes that, at times, resembled my experiences. Most of all, I felt inspired by the recurring stories of resilience amid trauma and aggression.

This study was an intellectual journey, as it confirmed and expanded my understanding of the phenomenon of being a woman leader who survived childhood bullying. It confirmed my initial belief that bullying experiences informed my empathic approach to leadership. This connection is not direct, but like the women in this study described, can at least be partially derived from early traumas.

I did not expect the descriptions of continued aggression and marginalization as adult women leaders. These women assumed positions of power within their

organizations, but others sometimes attempted to prevent them from assuming their roles in an authentic way. I, too, have had similar marginalizing leadership experiences. I am now informed about the strength, presence, and impact of leadership and social norms for women and women leaders and feel inclined to address these through future research and practice.

Recommendations

Through the descriptions of childhood coping and resilience to bullying and other traumas, the women leaders in this study illuminated opportunities for potential policy and environmental and programmatic action within the settings children and adults frequent. While there are numerous existing primary prevention efforts to stop bullying so it never starts or secondary prevention to stop it if it occurs within schools (Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014), the following suggestions are preventative on a tertiary level. The suggestions intend to reduce further harm and help bullying victims use strategies participants identified after they have experienced bullying. Through their learnings as adults and experiences with leadership, the women in this study also illuminated potential action within leadership development educational programs. These recommendations are described below.

K-12 Recommendations

While there are a variety of existing bullying intervention programs, it seems they address immediate needs to prevent or eliminate bullying through strategies like skill building or campus-wide education about bullying (Evans, Fraser et al., 2014). This recommendation goes beyond the immediate needs to address bullying and suggests enhancing programs and activities that may provide long-term supports for victims.

Identify victims of bullying and offer tailored experiences. Three of the key themes from participant descriptions were mentorship from adults, safe places, and personal aspirations, suggesting not only programmatic interventions but perhaps environmental implications. It may be useful to specifically establish a component of adult mentorship programs (or establish a program where these programs do not exist) that would specifically recruit known bullying victims and provide tailored experiences. Similarly, participants described high personal and career aspirations as children. This may suggest that educators should recruit and tailor career development or other leadership programs within primary and secondary schools to known bullying victims and other students experiencing challenges.

Create "safe places" through policies and procedures. This study also highlighted the importance of safe places being not only a place that is free from bullying but also is a coping tool. Schools might offer a "safe" place for victimized children and other children who need respite to use as needed. This may include modifying school policies and procedures to allow students to use monitored classrooms or other sections of the school campus such as an office before, during, or after school. These safe places might be similar to meditation rooms more commonly seen on college campuses where students may freely use these quiet and comfortable spaces to relax, de-stress, pray, and focus in any way they choose. It is important to note that this suggestion is offered as an accompaniment to other interventions that will protect victims and stop bullying. It is not intended to be a standalone strategy.

Organizational and Leadership Development Recommendations

Increase awareness of gender norms. In addition to K-12 activities, this study like so many other studies sheds light on prevailing gender norms within organizations and the ramifications of conflicting with these norms. Thus, it would seem beneficial for leaders and organizations to be more aware of these norms. Increasing awareness of workplace gender norms through formal curricular additions to academic and leadership development programs may help both women and men understand how these norms influence the workplace and contribute or detract from leadership. Students and employees could then actively decide how they may or may not embody these norms.

At the organizational level in practice, it may also be beneficial to analyze and adjust workplace expectations and practices to support leadership approaches and needs by both men and women (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010) and create the conditions that will allow both men and women to succeed and assume leadership positions within the workplace (Powell, 2011). Specifically, training and performance management that increases awareness of leadership gender bias and stereotyping for all employees may be an initial step to addressing some of the challenges participants described in this study. As a complementary and long-term strategy, changing organizational culture by recruiting, coaching, and supporting individuals who do not fit the "ideal worker image" (Bierema, 2016) throughout their employment or involvement with organizations would seem relevant to participants in this study as participants described instances of not being accepted.

Actionable Recommendations for Scholars

Consider how female perspectives are uniquely represented in bullying studies. This study added voices to the limited female perspective of qualitative literature on childhood bullying and contributed the qualitative research, in general. Aligned with these outcomes, scholars might consider how female perspectives are uniquely and perhaps collectively represented within the bullying studies. Much of the existing childhood bullying literature examines bullying from a balanced perspective between boys and girls and men and women.

Additional Research

As with any study, study limitations and parameters create opportunities for additional research. Additional research on follower perspectives, male leader perspectives, and a meta-analysis of literature is suggested.

Follower opinions. One area of additional exploration is to assess follower opinions about women leaders who survived childhood bullying. This study relied on self-descriptions and perceptions from leaders, but it is not known how these descriptions align with follower descriptions or perceptions. Results from such a study would be especially relevant to corroborate participants' prosocial and empathic follower-focused approach.

Male leader perspectives. Another area of suggested exploration is the experience of male leaders who were bullied as children. Not only would this complement this study providing a more complete description of the experiences of all leaders, but also it would help describe the differences and similarities between how men who experienced childhood bullying compared to the women in this study. Such an

exploration may also further describe how the socially constructed male workplace and bullying norms appear for men.

Analysis of empathy skills. Based on adult participant descriptions of empathy as outcomes of trauma, it may be relevant to explore and examine the efficacy of leaders who believed they learned empathy from personal experience versus those who learn empathy skills from formal learning experiences. It may also be relevant to examine bullying survivors' affective and cognitive empathy at different points in the lifespan to determine how these attributes align with their self-descriptions as well as how they may change over time with different inputs.

Summary

By sharing their experiences, the women in this study provided a learning opportunity to practitioners and scholars alike about potential practical implications and additional research. Potential changes within learning environments could directly address long-term school-based supports and needed changes within the workplace participants highlighted in this study. Additional research about follower experiences and the experiences for men would also provide a greater understanding of all perspectives for those affected by childhood bullying or working with leaders who have been bullied.

The seven women leaders in this study also provided a window into their lived experiences, approaches to leadership, as well as challenges and successes while leading. In doing so, they made evident how the experience of childhood traumas and bullying live long after childhood experiences. These experiences live on through what these women have learned as leaders; how they enact their learnings; and the intentional actions to lead followers in prosocial, empathic, and altruistic ways. These experiences

also live on through these leaders' impact within their communities and workplaces and their intended impact on the hearts and minds of their followers.

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Appendix A: Email Invitation

(date)

Dear _____.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a doctoral research project about the experience of leading and a childhood bullying survivor entitled "Being a Leader, a Woman and Survivor of Childhood Bullying: A Phenomenological Study." This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for my Doctoral Degree under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Geller, Principal Investigator and dissertation Supervising Professor at Drexel University.

If you choose to participate, I request to conduct three 60-minute interviews with you. In addition to these interviews, I will ask you to write in a journal between the interviews. I will provide the journal to you.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, all participants will remain anonymous, and will be given pseudonym. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without consequences. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

If you have questions, I would be happy to talk in more detail. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kathy Geller.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,
Marcella Gonsalves

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

CHILDHOOD BULLYING INTERVIEW - QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your thoughts, reactions or reflections since the last time we spoke. (If second interview)
2. To start, tell me about what you were like as a kid?
3. Let's now talk about your bullying experiences as a child. Tell me about how the bullying happened and how long it lasted.
4. What was your response to the bullying as a child?
5. How did you cope with the bullying as a child and perhaps as you grew into an adult?
6. Do you think that these child experiences are still with you today? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. Have you experienced bullying as an adult? If so, tell me more about that.
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW – QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your thoughts, reactions or reflections since the last time we spoke. (If second interview)
2. We will be talking about leading today. To start, what do you think makes a leader?
3. How did you become the leader you are today?
4. What makes you a leader?

5. Describe a time or a few times that you felt very successful while leading? What were your keys to success?
6. Describe a time when you felt that you weren't successful while leading? What do you think went wrong?
7. How did others describe your leadership style? Why do you think they describe you that way?
8. Describe examples of your leadership best and worst instances.
9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

THIRD INTERVIEW – QUESTIONS

1. We spent the first interview discussing your experiences with bullying and the second interview discussing leadership. You also completed a journaling activity about your leadership. Given these discussions, what reflections, insights or thoughts do you now have these two aspects of your life?
2. We talked about what it was like when you were bullied. If you could go back in time and give yourself some advice when you were a child about being bullied, what would it be?
3. We discussed how you became a leader and what makes you a leader. Do you think your leadership journey is uncommon? Why or why not?
4. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix C: Reflection Journal

POST LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. Describe the first time you were bullied as a child. What happened? What did it feel like? What did you do? How did you cope?
2. Why do you think you were bullied?
3. Describe when the bullying stopped. Why do you think it stopped?
4. Have you experienced bullying as an adult? If so, how? Describe a specific incident and how you felt and what you were thinking during that time. If you have not experienced bullying, have you seen others bullied? If so, what was your reaction to that experience?

POST BULLYING INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. What made you the leader you are today?
2. Ask someone you are leading to describe your leadership characteristics. How did they describe them? What is your reaction to this description?
3. Describe any instances when you were at your leadership best or worst. What made them your best or worst?
4. How are you like or unlike other leaders?
5. Describe any reflections you may have had since the last interview.

POST SECOND INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. Describe any reflections, questions, and/or additional thoughts you may have had since the last interview.
2. Do you wish you had never been bullied? Why or why not?
3. What did you learn or take away from your bullying experiences? Have you used these learnings as a leader? If so, how?

What did you take away from these interviews (if anything)? How might you use these takeaways in the future?